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DUAL LIVES.

BY

J. C. Chillington.

“Our lives are interwoven here below, frequently, indeed most frequently, without our knowing it. We are in great part moulded by unconscious interaction.”

JOHN TYNDALL, F.R.S.



In Three Volumes.

Vol. III.

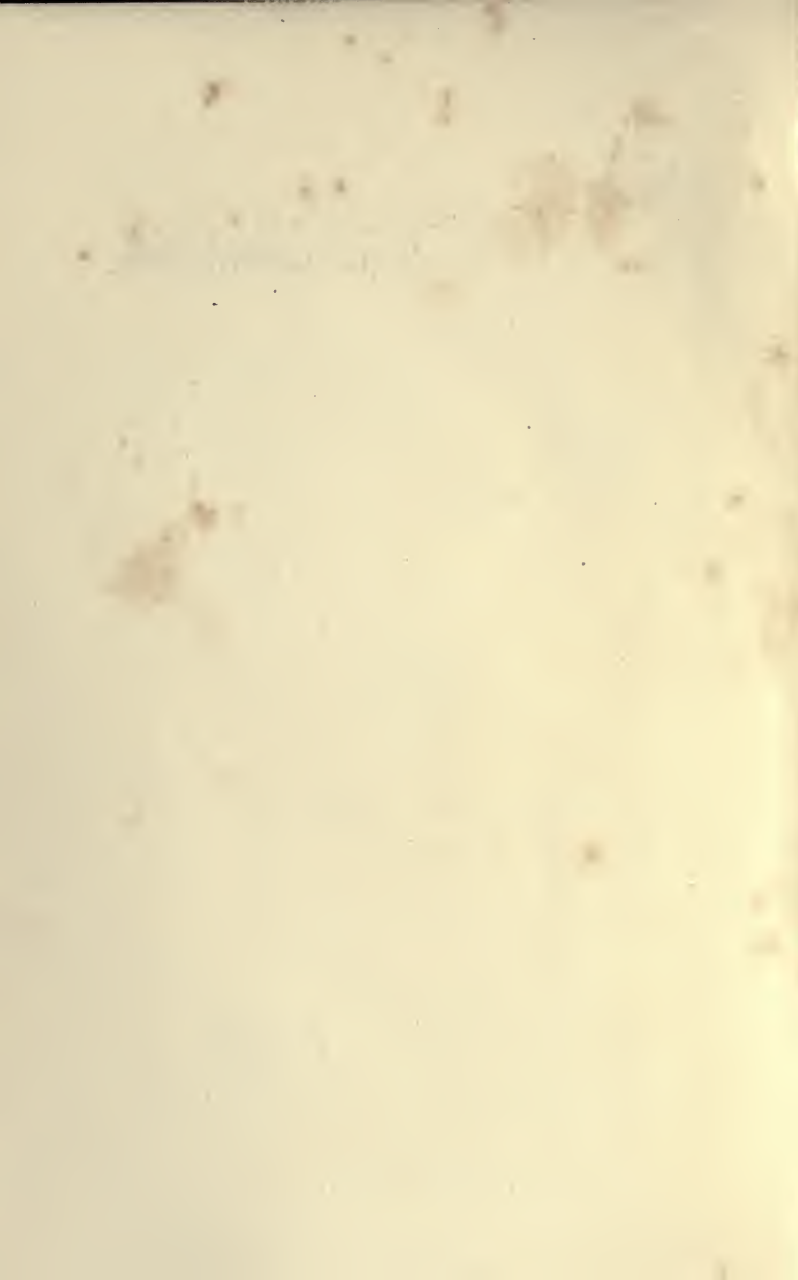
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DUAL LIVES.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER FROM THE EAST.

WHEN Willy Downs had elected to give up his Indian prospects, and cling to his grandmother, he had also entangled himself in another obligation by accepting Mr. Cochrane's offer, and had remained a faithful and interested adherent of that house. Shortly after Mrs. Watson died, Willy had become a sort of nursing head to the business, until such time as the grandson should be old enough to carry on the family tradition. The trust was solemnly renewed

when old Mr. Cochrane himself was departing this life. Such was his obligation. As for himself, Willy loved the old home where he had spent his life, he loved every sod in the fields, every hedgerow, and every lane. He loved his memories, too, and still clung to his dreams. Those two questions, now a matter of years gone by, that had so closely riveted themselves on his mind, yet remained to be concluded. Thus the past, the present, and a something that seemed to await him in the future, knit him as strongly as ever to the old place. But, in spite of his dreamy character, his intentions were not of a selfish nature, as is too often the case with those who have a vivid life withdrawn from outer surroundings; and a clear sense of duty, clashing with inclination, was now compelling him to listen to its appeals.

There was a pretty, old-fashioned garden at the back of the house, and since his very early days Willy, by his own labour—and later on by skilled assistance—had converted

a portion of it into a veritable open-air boudoir. All through the summer, unless it was actually raining, he would spend a portion of the evening here, under the clouds and the stars ; sometimes, with the nightingales singing in the boughs of the old thorn that yearly bore the glorious burden of its summer snow ; sometimes, with the music of the storm-wind in the great old trees on the hill, where stood the church like a mother, guarding her sleeping children around her. To him this had never been a solitude ; the wind had a voice, the stars had hope, the clouds wreathed fairy fancies as they moved between him and the blue, and all nature held converse with him, as messengers from that beyond his finite grasp, to which he only reached by prayer and adoration.

He sat here now, and held a letter in his hand. It was long and closely written, and had arrived that morning, but he had not before found time to decipher its contents.

"MY DEAR WILLIAM,

"Your last was more cheerful, I am glad to say ; for it don't do for a young man, with the world before him, to be dying of doleful dumps in a little country village. Of course, as your uncle said, it was quite natural, but I did not feel so satisfied about natural things, for I was really afraid to open this letter, thinking it would be sure to say, Fanny and her husband were not sufficient company, and that some dear girl was going to help you bear your lot ! Don't you do any such thing until you have looked round the world a little. But I'm sorry I said it, for young people never take advice, but always the other way. Now, my dear, there was Amy. She's had so many lovers you could not count them on your fingers. There was a Body-guard, and a Bengal Artillery and Cavalry, both beautiful uniforms, and a Political, and lots of others, and what does she do but choose a plain N. I. man ! Well, he's my son-in-law now, and very nice ; but I think, if I had been Amy, the blue and silver would have been my choice. Jordan laughs, and tells me to be patient, and maybe some day I'll have a blue and silver grandson, and I do hope whatever she does she'll put them all in the army. I don't think there's anything like the military, though, my dear, I mustn't say so here, for its all civilians and politicals, and that kind, that are thought much of. But all the years I've been here I've never changed my mind, and I do say, for polite manners, no one can compare. Of course, *we* are merchants, but well-to-do merchants, head ones you know, and all mix with the others, just the

same as I told you—about Government balls, and all that.

“Well, Jordan sold his whole concern, and got near a lac of rupees for it, though there was a man that would have played him false ; but he got found out in time, and now he’s gone, and taken his wife with him, and a good thing too, for it was not a case of handsome is that handsome does ; but with her wit and her big eyes, she was running a lot of poor boys into debt, and her jewels are a fortune ;—Jordan says that is all women’s scandal. Your uncle has bought the Tea Estate on Lumbipahar, near Darjeeling. They say it’s a beautiful property, and I wanted Amy to wait and see it, and be married from there ; but some one told her she couldn’t be properly married in Darjeeling, as she’d have to go to church on a pony, or be carried in a carpet tied on a stick, so she cried, and was married from here. It was a beautiful wedding, and all her things from Madame Bodelio ; no expense spared. And now they are up in the Mofussil, and she says it does not much matter if you have a dress or not, so her pretty things are all shut up in tin. I shall be very sorry to leave my old home here, but glad to be going. I don’t like Jordan’s looks at all, and he’s always short and don’t enjoy his curry like he used, and every one says it’s the climate. I did want him to come home and buy that big farm near Upper Melcombe, with the old red house to it, and do it up and live there, and have Amy and her husband home ; but he says he couldn’t live without his bearer, and I don’t think he could, for he can’t reach to put on his socks, but I dare say a body-servant would

do that, if he was paid for it; but Jordan says he couldn't have a white man dancing about him, it would make him miserable.

"Indeed, my dear William, we are both getting very old, and want some one to take care of us very much. I should think young Cochrane must be grown into the business by now, and then you can never say anything hinders you from coming. Of course, it's different now, and Darjeeling is not like Calcutta—it is a very quiet place, and rains dreadfully; but it would be a change, and the journey is easy, and if your uncle got fond of you, and I'm sure there is every chance of it, you might work on his feelings to come home and die in the old country, and, indeed, I wish he would."

Poor Aunt Jordan! He could see her and hear her as he read the letter; hear the emphatic voice of old, and see the portly figure. But the voice would be subdued, and the figure would stoop, he felt sure of that; all through her mingled story he could catch the note of approaching age.

She was his only surviving relative, and perhaps, as she suggested, they might all return together. The tea estate had only cost a small sum, in proportion to the balance of the property, which was partly settled

on Amy, and partly funded for income. There would be no difficulty in disposing of the new acquisition.

Anyhow, he made up his mind to write and tell her he was seriously thinking it over. In a few months the trust he had taken from his kind old friend would be fulfilled; and sitting here all alone, he flushed with pleasure to think—how well fulfilled. It seemed almost as if he felt the familiar tap of encouragement and approval on his shoulder, as in his young and timid days. It was quite true, when that was once over, nothing but his longing to remain where he was would stand between him and this journey, which was a very different thing to what it had been when first proposed. As the stars came out, and the darkness closed in, he recalled his old watch from the window of his bedroom, that evening after his aunt's first suggestion. He recalled it with that mysterious tremor of pain, that is always left by the vivid awaking of any past

scene. How he wished he could feel again the impulse of desire for strange and unseen lands.

Alas ! was he too, growing old ?





CHAPTER II.

AFFINITIES.

AT last destiny had so ordered the footsteps of these two men that their pathways crossed once more as their stars had decreed. Peters' pilgrimage was over, and, contrary to his wont, he was taking his parting journey down to Widbury village, bound for Melcombe and the accommodation of the railway. The road was unchanged since the time that Emma Phillips had rented the Lake Cottage. A quiet old couple dwelt in it now, and kept its garden neat and trim. The railing still stood above the lower path that traced the border of the lake, and beside this railing to-night

a man was standing, lost in a maze of thought that travelled backwards and forwards, over the known past and the unknown future. How many times he had traversed that path; how many times had stood dreaming as now; but what different dreams! His outward seeming had changed more than his inner man; but still the earnest expression of his dreaming eyes, his frank smile, and confidence-inspiring manner remained the same. Presently a stranger approached the spot. He was dressed like a working man. His tall figure moved along with swinging step, erect and masterful. A something in the sound of his footstep roused the dreamer from his vision, and he turned to look at the passer-by. Their eyes met; so did the two immortals that looked out of them—and one of the broken links was mended!

Peters smiled as he regarded his old acquaintance—though his recognition had been somewhat slower—well-pleased to see

that Fortune had been good to him. A gleam of joy lit up the other face, but a deeper feeling lay behind that dimmed his vision, his ready sympathetic spirit seeing at a glance something of the aspect of that unwritten history looking out of those never-to-be-forgotten blue eyes. Their hands met without a word; then Peters laughed and spoke—

“Yes, Downs—Willy Downs—I remember your name very well. How is it that I have often been in these parts, and, wondering where you were, have never seen you?”

The announcement was surprising; the answer did not come readily. Then slowly Willy said—

“Have you? That is strange. I too have wondered, and watched, and waited. I knew you would come some day. But you are only just in time, for this is my last night at Widbury, and to-morrow I shall have gone, perhaps for ever!”

“Really! that surprises me; for you look as though Fate had smiled upon you in your native town.”

“Is that what you call it,” said Willy. “To-night I may be softened; but somehow that heathen word does not express what I have been feeling about the Power that orders our goings.”

Peters looked down thoughtfully and paused. Then he said—

“Why are you going? Is it a wish, or a call, or a necessity?”

“Chiefly a call. In my turn, may I ask where you are going now?”

“By train, 7.30 to Meaton, close by Bymouth.”

“Not to-night,” said Willy, holding out a detaining hand. “Come home with me. Do you know, I was going to Bymouth to-morrow. We will start together.”

Peters looked round. Against the sunset sky was the clear outline of a church spire, and to the right the wooded slope where,

hidden by the trees that sheltered it on all sides, lay Shirley Hall.

“Where do you live?” he asked. “Are you alone, or will neighbours be coming to bid you ‘God-speed,’ and all that sort of thing?”

“No,” said Willy, smiling; “my good-byes have all been spoken.”

“Then I will not resist that invisible influence that has put a kind of bond between us somehow. We met once—let me see—fifteen years ago, for hardly more than an hour, and I feel as if I had known you since the world began.”

With a strange pleasure in the act, Willy walked with his companion up the wide street of the village. They spoke little on their way, for each according to his own temperament and circumstances was gathering his thoughts together. The situation was unique; the elder man finding himself in the presence of one of two beings only, in the wide universe, who knew of his part

in that sad old story; and the younger, who had dreamt a hundred dreams over these long gone days, and finished the drama in many different imaginings, was waiting for something, he knew not what, that must happen now. As a matter of substantial reflection, Willy Downs was conscious that he found himself in the company of an old acquaintance, who knew nothing about him but his name, and the fact that he was once a messenger!

The old house was to be left standing as it was, with the old servants to look after it, and Fanny had taken a very gloomy view of life since this decision of her master had been confided to her. The eyes of astonishment, with which she received a visitor, looked very red with the shedding of her honest tears.

To-night the garden held two comfortable chairs instead of the solitary one; two thin lines of smoke rose and vanished in mid-air. At first there was silence, then broken

sentences, and then established and free-flowing talk.

Willy began by referring to Peters' first remark.

"Yes," he said, "the resolve to go is far weaker than the wish to stay. I shall leave half myself behind me in this little home where I was born, and where I have lived all my life."

"Indeed!" said Peters; "then you, with your sensitive impulsive temperament, should be a poet. Are you?"

Willy smiled.

"No; I could never be a poet. I have lived with them so much that they have said all my thoughts for me."

And then he told simply the story of his birth, his life with his grandmother, his business, and his rise; alluding to that time which was present in both their minds by, "then, when I first saw you," and leaving out all mention of mere details, except as connected with the fact of his carrying that

startling news from the Lake Cottage to the Hall. Telling of his beloved squire, and all his goodness, especially of his generous forbearance to question further when Willy had hesitated to speak of Peters.

His hearer sat, silent and attentive, and made no interruption—the whiffs of smoke may have come more short and sharp, that was all ; but Willy, with the strange intuition which was his dower, feeling the prick of each reminder as it must touch his listener, condensed the next portion of his history, speaking low and reverently as of sacred things.

“ After poor Mr. Holdness died, she came back to Shirley, and has lived here ever since, moving like an angel of hope from house to house bringing happiness everywhere with her pure and gentle presence, not all unhappy, though faithful unto death ; and her daughter, sweet Miss Doris, following in her mother’s footsteps as a young bright girl may.”

There was a short unbroken pause, and he continued—

“ My father’s sister was at home then, and I saw a good deal of her. She was very good to me, and we have corresponded ever since. Her husband has now a tea plantation in the Himalayas. She wanted me to go back to India with her then, but nothing could have made it right to leave my grandmother. It is different now ; she is my only relative, and is growing old. Her husband will not leave the country where he has made his home for forty years, and she wants me to go there and be the stay of their old age. They have only one daughter who is married and living at a distance. My old friend Mr. Cochrane is dead ; his grandson has grown up to take his place ; my means are ample for my wants, and it seems to me, the call of duty should be put before the wish, to continue my peaceful and contented—but I cannot deny it—somewhat selfish existence here.”

“ Right, my friend,” said Peters ; and

taking his pipe from his mouth, he looked contemplatively at his companion. "By Jove," he continued, "how straight your road has been! And mine—pretty devious. I am glad the crooked line crossed yours so innocently. It seems churlish and reserved not to return your confidence, in giving a story of a life, but—well, it is soon summed up. I also only claim one relative who lives only in memory—but a memory that has never left me. I speak of my mother." His voice was grave and stern as Willy had heard it only once before. After a minute's silence, as if he stood on holy ground he went on with the brightness and charm that was so irresistible—

"I christened myself, you know; my baptismal certificate wouldn't know me. Even this much is a confession I have never made before, and if I don't introduce myself honestly to you, I am sure you will understand that I have reasons which do not affect me—personally—alone. I have

chosen my profession ; I am only a man among other men. For years I have wandered from place to place, until about four years ago when Fate—no—you don't like Fate—well something beyond definition, made me cast anchor at Meaton, and if circumstances are kind, I shall remain there for the present."

He laughed, a low infectious laughter ; but with an echo of sadness in it, or so it seemed in his listener's ear. The same note that had appealed to his sympathetic spirit years ago, when he described it to the squire, "as if he was mocking himself all the time."

"Yes," Peters continued, "when I first found it necessary to put something before Peters, I very nearly called myself Petrified Peters ; but that would have been too attractive and would have defeated my purpose, so I prefixed a capital P and if any one is inquisitive enough to require more, I cover my want of originality by repetition, and say Peter Peters. Now beginning with Peters,

Peter Peters, or Mr. Peters, or even P. Peters, Esquire, I can tell you a few facts about myself that may interest you. Even voluntary waifs feel lonely sometimes, especially if their digestion or other machinery is out of order. I had been indulging in what is called an illness, and was so much subdued by it, that weakness and want of energy kept me in the place where the attack occurred. When I could move a little without tumbling about, I used to crawl down on sunny days to Meaton sands, and sit on the rocks, taking the sea air instead of the doctor's tonic. There I made the acquaintance of a lad—and how dear that lad has become to me, I myself can hardly realize! You see, I'm not given to making acquaintances; but he made me go and see his parents, and I am quite one of a family circle, for his sake. Mr. Barton is an invalid; and they seem very comfortably off, but the mother is a strange silent woman. Showing no demonstrative affection for the

boy, she surrounds him with observances, never lets him play or associate with other boys, and for this reason, just after I became acquainted with them, she removed him from the high school, and could not make up her mind to send him elsewhere. It was then the idea came into my mind, that I would cling to this pleasant stray sunshine that had fallen across my path. To the dear lad's pleasure, and my satisfaction, they made him over to me, and I am a coach. I have rubbed up all the old university work, and we have real pleasant times together; all for love, you know. When he began to go ahead, I secured the assistance of a learned curate, whose purse is never too well filled—a very good sort of fellow he is too—and we are all three becoming quite highly educated characters in the pleasantest way. This has been holiday time; but now I am going back to Meaton and Harry Barton, and if you will condescend to correspond with me from your Himalayan height, you shall hear fine things

of him some day I hope. By the way, you said you were going to Bymouth; why not come to Meaton instead, and stay with me until you start, and see my lad?"

"I should like it of all things, and it will fit in well. I leave England by a P. and O. steamer from Southampton. I was going to Bymouth, but—only a curious fancy I had before starting to see that the Ships' Inn was still standing! There is no need to go there now."





CHAPTER III.

AT MEATON.

THE sun was setting behind the firs of Meaton parsonage, and between the stems of the tall trees one could catch the glitter of its path across the sea. On the trim drive between the gateway and the house, four long-limbed lads were pacing up and down in eager and professional talk. The tallest of them flourished a bat, and every now and again would stop and give an illustration of some discussed hit or mode of handling, for the last cricket match of the season had that day been played; and in the victory of Meaton over Bymouth, that bat and its owner had carried

off the top score, almost beating the record. In a sheltered corner near the house two ladies sat conversing; one busily stitched away at the wool background of a dog's head surrounded by roses, and the other had beside her a basket of stockings which she was busily darning. They seemed as much interested in the events of the day as the young men themselves, and despite the proverbial jealousy for their offspring, they were unanimous in praise of the day's hero, who did not belong to either of them. They talked not only of his play, but of his manly beauty and good qualities. At last the softly sighed phrase, "Poor lad!" turned their talk into a more feminine course, and the lady, who was the visitor, quickly responded to the speaker, who was her hostess.

"Can you ever get to know the family?"

"Well, my dear," with a shrug of her shoulders, "it does not seem to be a gratifying attainment. It is a very mournful ménage, I can assure you."

“So it seemed to me the day that Johnny dragged me there to call, a few months ago. Have they been here long?”

“About twelve or thirteen years; but his uncle, old Mr. Barton, of course had lived here all his life. He was a bachelor and a great character in the neighbourhood. My husband’s father remembers a very pretty young sister who had lived with him years before, but she ran away and married very much beneath her, and her brother would never see her or speak to her again. She was the present Mr. Barton’s mother. He took his uncle’s name some years before the old man died, my husband went to see him, and he took him into the dining-room and showed him a large crayon portrait of a young man. ‘There,’ he said, ‘that’s my heir. I won’t look at him or touch him, but I wanted to see what he was like. I am glad he favours the family.’ He never spoke of him again; whether he knew of his accident and crippled state I don’t know.”

"I have never seen Mr. Barton," said the visitor, "but Johnny has; and he says he must have been a splendid man, though not a bit like Harry."

"Oh, Harry," said Mrs. Hignett, "Harry has a beauty of his own, and a charm neither of his parents can ever lay claim to. His mother is, I think without exception, the most taciturn, unsympathetic woman I have ever seen; but a devoted wife, I must say that for her. I feel quite wicked sometimes to be so unfriendly, for it must be terrible to see a loved one's life so wrecked. But that dear boy's brightness seems quite thrown away. What would have become of him if he had not found a friend like Mr. Peters, I don't know."

"Yes, he seems to be a delightful person, quite a boy with boys, and yet so reserved and secluded. He ought to marry, and bring a nice wife here to add to our little society."

"Yes, I think he ought to marry," said

Mrs. Hignett, rising. She spoke seriously, this kind womanly woman, who darned her boys' stockings. Marriage was to her a solemn and important business, for her quiver was very full, and her three eldest were daughters. She collected her work, and placing it in the basket, said, "The dews are beginning to fall early."

Then her visitor, taking the hint, called out to her Johnny to come and make his adieux as it was getting late, and with him, on the same errand, came Harry Barton.

Mrs. Hignett detained the latter for a moment, and when the others had taken their departure, asked him to stay and have supper.

"I should like to very much," said the boy; "but I am going to the junction to meet the 'Flint.' He comes back to-night, and I want to tell him we've won the match."

Mrs. Hignett smiled.

“ ‘The Flint,’ ” she said, “ whatever makes you call him that ? ”

“ He told me to, when I was quite a little chap, and I have done it ever since, and got quite fond of it ; though it’s not a good description of him, is it ? ” and the lad’s eyes were bright with affection, a brightness due to that well of feeling which yields waters sweet and bitter. So he went off, escorted to the gate by his comrades, and walked briskly along the lane that leads up a rather steep ascent, till it gains the higher table-land that lies between Meaton and the line of rail.

“ I say, he *is* a chap, you’d never think he’s been at it all day. I don’t think he could be beat ! ” The hearty appreciation seemed well deserved, but the admiring lads who watched him did not take into count the splendid stimulant of pleasant anticipation.

The junction, five miles away, now a roaring, panting, ever-changing scene, was then only a little blot on a lovely country

landscape, where, near a group of sheds called a station, a smaller branch of rails diverged from the main line which led to Bymouth. The timing was not quite so perfect as it is now, stress of traffic had not yet led to the careful calculation of a minute, nor made it a matter of life and death to be devious in punctuality. Harry Barton had, therefore, a little time to wait for his friend's arrival.

When they had walked quietly away from Widbury in "the tearful glimmer of the languid dawn," Peters and Willy had been very silent, but as the sun rose in the heavens, and air and movement brought a renewal of energy and life, their faces grew less sombre, and their tongues were loosed.

Willy carried in his hand only a small carpet-bag, and presently, eyeing this, and then turning on his companion an inquiring and humorous glance, Peters, said—

"Excuse me, Downs, but are you going to assimilate yourself with the savages be-

forehand, and leave off wearing clothes? How far on in your journey will you be allowed to begin?"

Downs looked up at him, as usual not catching the meaning of the words, until the merry eyes had flashed the mirth into them.

He laughed.

"Did you think this constituted my baggage for a journey to the East?"

"I confess the idea was alarming, but reasonable under the circumstances," said Peters.

"I shrank from a final great good-bye as much as possible," Willy said. "So everything has been done by degrees. My boxes, sent on ahead, are awaiting me at Southampton, and I hope to begin with clothes, whatever I may arrive at! As for the old home, it is to stand still and wait for me. The garden kept up and the fruits and flowers given to the old people who can work no more. I only said one good-bye," he added gravely, "because—he is growing

old, and it was better to bear the pain of that than remember that I had run away from it. It very nearly made me change my mind ; but we won't talk of it now. I have given myself a week' only, and this bag holds a deal—as much as yours, anyhow."

"Wait awhile," said Peters ; "there's magic in my bag."

They did not take the train from Nether Melcombe ; but had a pleasant and lingering walk across country, having made up their minds to rest at Oxton that night, and strike the line at a station further on the next day. They talked of many things on their way, by desultory remarks and small utterances, ripening the sympathies that drew them to each other, and the last pipe they smoked that night, walking up and down under the starlit sky, in the sweet-scented garden of the little country hostelry where they rested, was finished almost in silence. But that twenty-four hours had put a never-to-be-

broken seal on a friendship that had been approaching them under some invisible influences for the last fifteen years.

The next morning Downs awoke with a very pleasing remembrance of his companion, and a determination to enjoy the fleeting hours and forget to-morrow. His rather unique mode of thinking filled his mind with Peters—Peters the being, not the body—and when they met, the incomprehensible something in the dreamy eyes, said good morning to the other incomprehensible something, that had so many moods and changes, as it glanced out from its restraining embodiment. It was Peters, that was all he cared to know. Not until he reached the station, as he was following his companion along the platform, did Downs become aware of the transformation brought about by careful dressing, or realize the extent of what that little box, strapped across his friend's shoulders, was capable of containing.

They took their places, and then Peters,

meeting his friend's eyes, divined that they had been opened.

"Yes," he said, "I am P. Peters, Esq., now."

Downs said nothing; he turned towards the window and watched the flying landscape. In his mind there was a far-away echo of his own young voice.

"Oh, sir, he might have been a royal king in disguise!"

When they got out at the platform at the junction, Harry Barton would have been best pleased to have his "Flint" to himself. The quiet, dreamy stranger did not appear quite so enthusiastic as seemed necessary, to make him one with them in their jubilant rehearsal of the day's triumph. But they all walked cheerily to Peters' room and had supper, and if the Flint's friend did not talk much, he was a very good listener, and pleasant to look at. So the lad soliloquized, as he sauntered home by the sounding sea to the large square house under the shelter

of the cliff, which had been his home ever since he could remember.

The window of one of the lower rooms facing the sea was open, and there were lights inside, but no sound of voices, and his step on the path, strewn with crisp-sounding shingle, brought no loving face to the window, no loving welcome to the still open door. His day had been full of bright companionship and enjoyment, as his days often were ; but this last scene generally brought a chill over him, and he never thought of that path, and that little gate, and open door, without one ever-present regret that he had no sister.

His father lay half dozing on his invalid couch, but looked up quickly when he saw him. His mother sat beside him, her knitting in her hand, and the book she had been reading aloud open on her knee.

She looked up sadly, and said, "Well, dear?"

"Here I am, mother," the lad replied.

Then going to his father, and softly stroking the helpless hand, that lay extended on the rug, covering the poor useless limbs, he added, "We won the match, father."

The handsome, wistful face turned to him, a sort of baffled comprehension in its expression.

"Oh, you won the match. Well done! Well done! I used to play cricket once." And then again he relapsed into silence.

"Are you tired, Harry?" his mother asked. "Have you had supper, my dear?"

"Yes, thanks, mother," the lad replied, seating himself in a low chair beside her and taking up the book that lay upon her knee, ready, as was his wont, to become absorbed in its contents directly the conversation flagged.

"I supped with the 'Flint.' He is home again, you know, and he's brought a friend with him for a few days. A nice-looking chap, but rather dreamy. I think he'd miss a catch pretty often."

“What is his name? Is he going to stay long?”

The knitting-needle slackened as the question was spoken, not asked, for the tone of voice implied no curiosity as to the reply, and by her anxious glance towards the couch the boy could see that, as usual her attention, easily drawn from him, was being given wholly to the occupant. He knew this from long experience, and had grown up to regard it as a natural and correct thing; so, turning over the leaves of his book in search of the place where he had left off reading that morning, he answered briefly—

“His name is Downs. He comes from a village called Widbury, near Nether Melcombe. I don’t think he’ll be here long.”

Mrs. Barton rose suddenly and stood by her husband.

He looked up at her, and said, in an appealing and sad voice—

“Widbury?—Nether Melcombe? I lived there!”

“Yes, dear; yes.”

“I could walk then.”

The tears fell silently down his wife's pale face as she stood behind him, and gently placed her hand on the thick curly hair that, spite of time, showed as yet no white streak in the rich sunny brown.

The boy was buried in his book. The room was unchanged, but the spectre of a hidden sin had stalked through their midst, and left a sting in one poor aching heart!

Since Harry's earliest recollection this had been his home life. Of a happy disposition and unselfish character, it had always seemed to him quite natural under the circumstances. As he grew older and felt the power of muscle, the joy of health and movement, he realized more and more what had been taken from his poor stricken father, and felt the justice of bestowing on him all the attention, care, and solicitude that could be given. At

times he had yearned to give his share of these, and of sympathy and comradeship at least to his mother; but though never rebuffed or turned aside, though always a stranger to a rough or unkind word, he felt somehow outside it all; he had a consciousness that his mother did not care to share with him, in studying his father's comfort, that labour of love that he would so willingly have helped her to bear. He was surrounded by luxury, his purse kept well supplied, his rooms—for he had a study all to himself—handsomely furnished, and the household ready to attend his every wish and requirement. All about him were signs of thoughtful motherly care, and yet he lived a life apart. He had never been allowed to mix freely with other boys, except as school-work or school-play required it. He was allowed to accept no invitations to other homes, to have no guests of his own. But, with the dear and welcome advent of the "Flint," liberty, fraternity, and equality were all bestowed

upon him. He found for his boyish thoughts and fancies the ready sympathy and companionship that he had always wanted, while scarcely realizing what it was he missed.





CHAPTER IV.

GOOD-BYE.

THE days passed quickly; the weather, which after all has really so much to do with all one's enjoyments, was as glorious as only an English autumn can be in its best moods.

Downs was surrounded by strange experiences. First of all the sea was a fresh acquaintance; all he had known of it hitherto was the distant glitter as the coach had reached Bymouth that morning long ago, and then, the shine and the murmur that had come through the open door of that cottage on the Ships' Inn Quay. What a wonderful charm it had for him can easily be imagined.

He certainly only heard the soft and gentle voice as yet ; the roar of its fury when rising up to fight the boisterous wind, the lashing of the waves, the dark blue, white-capped angry ocean, he had yet to know. There were wonders on the shore too, old-world stories gleaming from the very stones that strewn the beach, strange forms of life and beautiful sea flowers. If nature had appeared infinite before, how beyond the power of words did he now recognize the vastness of even our infinitesimal flying ball, the greatness of that which gave it being. The lovely country inland was rich with scenes of harvest, scenes well-known and well-loved, and now invested with a subtle charm, such is the rule of perverse human nature, because he felt that long years might pass away before he looked upon their like again.

He found the little society that had gathered round his friend different also— younger and brighter, more full of stir and movement than what he had hitherto known ;

and, to his own surprise, he found himself growing almost talkative under its brisk influence. Harry's father and mother he had not seen, but he had taken tea at the parsonage, and had joined a picnic to the Wishing Well, given by Mrs. Bennet, Johnny's mother, and had wished once or twice—not at the well, but elsewhere—that his carpet-bag had been larger.

Every one, however, understood the circumstances, and for the most part took a great interest in his projected journey. The ladies chiefly trying to extract his private feelings on the subject of snakes, and the men speaking boldly of lions, tigers, and savages, as if these were bound to form a part of every domestic establishment in India. Even Mrs. Barton, who had excused herself from receiving him on the plea of her husband's health, developed a little interest on this head, and asked Mr. Peters if he thought his friend would take a parcel for her. Peters eyes laughed as he gave the message.

“I thought of your bag,” he said, “and dared not vow in your name. I asked how large it would be, and she said only a very small packet, so I told her to send it to-day, for I knew you’d say ‘Yes.’ And, by the way, I’m coming with you to-morrow; we’ll put up at Radley’s Hotel, and I’ll take you on board next morning. I shouldn’t feel comfortable letting you start by yourself.”

Downs said nothing, but he rose (he was sitting reading at the table when Peters came in), and hastily closing his book, walked to the other end of the room, carefully sought for its vacant corner on the shelf, and returned the volume with much precision to its place.

In the city of Bath at this time there dwelt an eminent physician, whom, in the early days of her husband’s misfortune Mrs. Barton had consulted. He had relatives living on the coast, to whom he usually paid an autumn visit, and improved the shining hour by inspecting some few patients who, as chronic

invalids with guineas to spare, felt a certain balm in receiving the visits of the great man."

He was sitting with Mrs. Barton now, in the pleasant breakfast-room that opened into a glass-enclosed verandah on the south-west side of the house. He was very professional and suave in manner, and probably felt something of the feeling that this manner suggested.

Mrs. Barton sat stiff and stern, replying in a cold, constrained voice to his questions.

"You think, then, that he shows less interest in passing events?"

"I think it is so."

"You see, my dear Mrs. Barton, this trouble is of long standing, indeed, you may remember that I anticipated serious results to follow much sooner than has happily been the case. But human skill has a limit, and the human frame can only bear a certain amount of disturbance. One thing only I can advise you, and that is quite unnecessary—don't contradict or cross his wishes. Keep

him as contented as you can. Now about your handsome boy. Mr. Peters tells me the lad ought to go away and be prepared for a successful university career, but that his father wishes him to remain here. Is this so? Does Mr. Barton really lay a stress on this?"

"It is always his answer when the question is put to him. If the boy went he would lose the one thing that rouses him from lethargy. Other people may talk in the room, and he never heeds, but he never misses a word Harry says."

"Very well, then, don't cross him. How old is your son?"

"Sixteen."

"There is time enough. Leave things as they are—for a little while. You apprehend my meaning? I know you are prepared. Now I will just see him once more, and the tonic and sedative I will send directly I return. There is only one chemist in England who understands the preparation, and I have taught him."

The great man had departed, his guineas in his pocket, and Mrs. Barton had gone to her writing-room upstairs. Before doing so, she had broken her ordinary custom by seeking Harry in his study. Her appearance was unexpected. Her set anxious face even whiter and more sternly repressed than usual. Combined with the fact of the doctor's visit, it filled the boy's mind with apprehension. He looked up at her affectionately, and instinctively held out his hand. To his great surprise she stooped and kissed his forehead, but her voice was cold and measured.

"My dear," she said, "I want you to take your books and sit beside father. I have something very important to do. He generally sleeps now, and will not miss me. Don't leave him until I come. Ring the bell if he wants anything. What is the name of the gentleman who is going to India?"

"Downs, mother—Mr. William Downs."

In about two hours she returned with a

small flat packet in her hand and a note for Mr. Peters. These she gave to Harry, and, taking up the knitting and placing the book within reach, assumed her place with the old stony cold demeanour. Touched to the heart by her unexpected caress, a vague dream that she might become to him as other mothers to their sons had been filling Harry with hope. But, chilled and disappointed, he left the room, put by his books, and went to find Mr. Downs or the "Flint," and deliver his message. He found both on the beach.

"You had better keep this," Peters said, when he had read the note. "It is addressed to me, but contains your instructions."

"DEAR MR PETERS,

"This is the little parcel. I have sewn it up. The address is on an inner cover. I shall esteem it a great kindness if Mr. Downs will carefully guard the paper, which is of importance, until this time next year, and then, taking off the outer cover, forward it to its destination.

"Yours, etc.

"E. BARTON."

The two men looked at each other and said, simultaneously, "Extraordinary!" Then Peters added—

"Without any effort of the imagination she always suggests things strange and unexpected, and yet—she is that boy's mother. Just look at him!"

A few paces before them, Harry, coat and hat discarded, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, was helping old Purdie and his son to beach their lumbering boat in view of the advancing tide.

He was a picture of youth, health, and boyish beauty, with his dark bright eyes and thick short lashes, his sun-burnt face and strong young frame.

Downs heartily added his eager admiration. Then, looking at Peters, he turned again to Harry Barton.

"I suppose it is constant companionship," he said, "but he is as like you as a dark man can be like a fair one, though your features are quite different."

No one ever left a place after a five days' sojourn, with more regret than did Willy Downs when he left Meaton. Certainly the jewel in the pleasant setting had not yet been taken from him, but he felt it needed some strength of mind to face, with any appearance of cheerful demeanour, the big wrench he was about to endure.

When the railway journey was over on the following day, and they had reached the port, they went to ascertain if everything was right at the P. and O. office, and then sauntered about looking for a deck-chair, which Peters said he had heard was indispensable.

"Choose a very narrow one," he said, "and then you'll sometimes have a chance of sitting in it yourself. Otherwise the flounces will monopolize it, even if you write your name a mile wide. Have you any books to read?"

"Yes, plenty, in my box."

"Then we'll go and order dinner."

So saying, they proceeded to Radley's

Hotel. Radley's Hotel ! Oh, if those walls could speak, what Anglo-Indian romances they would weave ! What sighs and tears, what hope and laughter, those rooms have witnessed, when the mighty exodus by overland set in, and exiles flocked to make a home, or risk a venture, or die or conquer, under the flag of the dear old country in that far land.

Quiet enough as a rule, the eve of the Overland Mail was a scene of stir and bustle at Radley's Hotel, and, spite of the thought of the morrow, Downs was drawn out of himself with the excitement and the novelty. He and his friend chose a coign of vantage, leaning over the gallery railing round the hall, and watched the new-comers. Two bright young faces appear early in the throng, their owners still in their teens. With them is a tall silent lady, not a mother evidently, or one with whom they are familiar, for they glance at her shyly, inspectingly, as it were—so prim they are,

so sedate. She leaves them for a moment in the hall, while she inquires about their rooms. They turn to each other in a burst of confidence.

“Isn’t she solemn, Jeanie?”

“Yes; but I don’t mind, it’s so jolly to be really going.”

“Perhaps she is sorry to go, like mamma was,” says the first speaker thoughtfully.

“Perhaps. I’m not.”

Jeanie’s companion gives a little pirouette, expressive of her sentiments, and suddenly pulls up, finding herself confronted by a tall young gentleman with very baggy clothes and a used-up expression of face, who has just entered the hall in time to witness the performance.

Jeanie, shaking with laughter, bends over the clasp of her bag, while the irrepressible one gazes at the chandelier as if turned to stone.

The young man passes, both the girls look after him with mirthful faces, and he turns to

take a parting inspection as he disappears from the door of the hotel.

"You'd better have your next *pas seul* in private, my dear," says Jeanie.

"Do you think he's going to look at his cabin?"

"You little silly! Do you think every one in Southampton is going to India in one big steamer?"

Then the pale lady returns, and they follow her.

Singly and in groups new-comers enter. Soldiers and civilians called, some carrying their badge of office in regulation tin boxes, some with the modest luggage of private life. But, by whatever name they may be known, soldiers always on their country's service, adding equally to her renown, sharing responsibility, offering the pride of intellect and the power of muscle with the same devotion at the same shrine.

Cabs with luggage follow after. Great rushing of waiters and porters, and fuss and

noise. Even the proprietor saunters into the hall, rubbing his hands, and, when the mountain is delivered, there appears a man, the sum of whose pomposity considerably surpasses his size. He is accompanied by a lady who wears her hair in long ringlets, and smiles with proud air of possession, as she surveys the boxes rapidly being piled up. All of them ornamented with a very large inscription, "MR. GORDON TOWNSEND LANG, A.C.B.C.S., passenger to Calcutta."

"A bride, certainly," softly says Peters. "Look at the little cock-a-doodle—he can crow, at all events."

For, quite absorbed in his own dignity, the little man has allowed them to take down the luggage, which was intended to go straight on board, and it has all to be reloaded.

With the voice of a stentor he directs the proceedings, and remonstrates wildly when his fly has to move on to make way for a new-comer—a tall, lazy, good-looking man,

belonging no doubt to the other branch of the service. He glances round superciliously, and walks through the crush, indicating his driver by a movement of his head, and saying to the nearest attendant in a lordly drawl, "Pay." He is evidently an old customer.

"It's like being at the play," Downs says. Then they went to the room where they had ordered dinner. Their talk that evening was pretty solid and matter-of-fact; but to one at least every event of it stood out against the contrasting background of—this time to-morrow.

Long after the excitement was hushed, and Radley's Hotel was peaceful, a watcher at the open window looked out on the stars and over the murmuring sea; before him hope and a new world; in the past, pleasant and softening memories, and God over all. It was with a sharp pain, however, that he followed his friend over the narrow plank, bridging the space between him and the

old familiar life, and realized, that only one of them would retrace his steps on this occasion.

They stood together on the ship's deck, saying little, watching the coming and the going, reading the histories that lay written before their eyes, and noting the various types of humanity that played their parts in them. There was a boy of about Harry's age, who attracted a good deal of their notice. He was parting from his father, a somewhat handsome but dissipated looking man, with a large diamond pin and a ring on his finger. There was little sentiment wasted on the boy's part, though the father had a sad, wistful look when he spoke to him.

It seemed as if each one was thinking only of himself or herself, and all around last words were being said in the most open and confiding manner, in a sort of conviction that every one else was too occupied to heed them.

The first bell sounded, and the stampede

began. The lad who had attracted Peter's attention, said—

“I think I'd better be off, father.”

There was a glitter in the man's eyes as he placed his hand on the boy's shoulder.

“Good-bye,” he said. “Frank, keep steady. All I have said to you is truth. You'll never repent it.” He wrung his hand ; then, leaning over the bulwarks, watched him cross the bridge and disappear in the collecting crowd.

Soon the second bell rang, and then Downs' turn was at hand. He could not speak. There was a long lingering grasp. Peters said—

“Write!”—and it was over.

Like the boy's father, he leaned over the bulwarks to see the last of that grand figure, that could be so easily distinguished from its surroundings.

There was a tramp of many feet—the vessel thrilled like a live creature—and as each beat of its pulse throbbed and quick-

ened, the gulf widened between the exiles and those from whom they were parting. Oh, for one more word, for one more hand-clasp! Too late! The great vessel turns slowly round, there is a sound of rushing water, the level beat of revolving paddle-wheels, and the good ship *Oriental* is under weigh, outward bound.





CHAPTER V.

ON THE GLAD WATERS.

SLOWLY the crowd of gazing faces pass in review, and then grow faint and indistinct in the distance. A man's hand, a woman's handkerchief, raised here and there in sign of yet another farewell.

Downs saw, or thought he saw, Peters to the very last, towering above the crowd, and felt strangely desolate, and lonely, and lost to all about him. In less than half an hour afterwards, however, he was hustled out of melancholy, and partaking in the general rush and confusion of settling down.

It was with a touch of dismay that he discovered the father of the boy before

mentioned was to be for some weeks the sharer of his narrow domicile. The man had something pleasant in his face too, and our dreamer and romance-creator immediately laid to his soul the reproof, that he was despising a fellow-creature, who was probably leaving home, joy, and love behind him, and all because he wore diamonds, and did not possess that air of refinement which was his ideal of companionship.

As for the man's thoughts, they were not flattering either, though they simply comprised a general estimate of Willy Downs, which was condensed in the term "raw." As to who shared his cabin he was perfectly indifferent. And all his proceedings indicated that this was no new journey to him. He set to work to settle his things in firm and systematic order, wishing his companion would take his head out of the port-hole, where he was gazing at the waves and shutting out the light ; and then, with a smile

on his face, and in a rather pleasant voice, he said—

“Is this your first voyage?”

Downs drew in his head.

“Yes,” he said; “it’s my first voyage.”

“Oh! I suppose we share this cabin between us? I’d like to give you a name. My name is Logan—Logan and Son, merchants, Calcutta.”

“Mine is Downs.”

“Well, Mr. Downs, if you’ll excuse me, I think you’d better open your bag and get your things out, you know, just in case you’re not a good sailor. They say we’ll have a breeze when we get into the open, and you won’t find your sea-legs without a little practice, under the most favourable circumstances.”

While engaged in following this advice, of which he recognized the wisdom, there was a clatter proceeding in the saloon, and presently the first bugle sounded for dinner.

“What’s that?” Downs said.

“That means dinner in half an hour. I’m going to book my place. Shall I fix yours too?”

And so it was arranged that these two people were thrown together by the ever-whirling wheel of destiny, unconscious of any connecting threads between the mazes of their lives seemingly so far apart. Not only that, but Downs’ first remark unsealed the truest and most genuine feelings in his companion’s heart.

“Your boy will miss you. I saw him on the deck.”

Ah, this young stranger had noticed his lad. He could talk about him sometimes. There was fellowship established at once. Though like the famous riddle, “When is love deformed?” it was *all on one side*.

In the hours of suffering that were approaching, nevertheless, Downs had his reward, for when the contest with winds and waves began, and he lay in his bunk with the mortal portion of him brought pain-

fully into the foreground, feeling as if his inner economy were on the top of his head, and his head inside his inner economy, the considerate attention he received afforded him such consolation as could be appreciated in these awful moments. During his novitiate, which luckily was very brief, how often did poor Willy wish himself back in dear old England. How often he vowed that even dear old England would never tempt him to put his foot on that moving monster, called a "steamer" ever, ever again.

Then the scene changed, and the pangs he had endured were forgotten. The sunny days, the bright sparkling waters, the quiet nights, when the ocean song in its swift rush along the vessel's side was only a lullaby! At times the mirth, the gay dresses, the laughter, and the idle life were infectious, and called into being an answering gaiety; while sometimes, as in his childish days, a hush would fall upon his spirit, a sense of incongruity, and he would leave the quarter-

deck and the microcosm man, and standing at the vessel's prow, and looking far ahead at the dim margin that ever retreated at their swift approach, would try to realize, with religious awe, how vast and incomprehensible was the power that "meteth out the heavens with a span."

Downs was thirty-two years of age. He was also a good-looking young man, with a strong and graceful figure, and courtly manners which belonged to him by nature. It can easily be understood, on remembering the circumstances of his career in life, his position, and the high standard of all his ideas, that in his very limited circle his heart had remained quite unscathed by female fascination.

Now, for the first time, he found himself in a society whose dominant law was that every John should have his Joan ; or, more properly, every Joan should have two or three Johnnies ! Naturally romantic and tender, this game at lasses and lads seemed

pleasant and attractive ; and, being welcomed into the bright circle, he joined the pretty play, buzzing like the bee from flower to flower, and enjoying the honey without any notion of a hive.

What a rainbow the passing days seemed when he recalled them afterwards ! Gibraltar, the dark rock of deliverance, made but a faint comparative impression, for his sharp sufferings were only just over. But Malta ! Valetta ! The clear green waters of the harbour, the dresses of the boatmen, the shouts and cries in foreign tongues ; and then the merry group that landed in a gaily decked boat, and wandered up the interminable streets of stairs, visiting the dried monks, the shops, and the church, overshadowed by the memories of Red Cross Knights and the glamour of old romance ! The whole scene flooded with sunshine, and ending with a hurried rush to gain the great dark vessel that lay on the calm water, snorting and panting to be off once more.

Could he ever forget the close of that bright happy day, the ascent of the ladder at the ship's side, in the dim evening light, and the soft clinging clasp of one little hand that began to assert a distinguishing touch of its own?

During all this time Downs' cabin companion kept chiefly to the smoking circle "for'ard," and did not intrude his presence into society. Willy quickly perceived that most of the ladies had very strict ideas about ranks, grades, professions, and colour. He did not quite understand how, under these circumstances, he himself had gained an entrance, and little imagined that he was practising dissimulation without knowing it. Being of a reticent nature, he had merely spoken of himself as a native of Somersetshire going out to see the country, and remaining in it for some indefinite time and at his own option. As the greater part of his companions were of some declared profession or occupation, this had a magnificent indepen-

dent property sound, of which he was quite unaware. One little sour-visaged lady, with three pretty girls in her charge, the stout little wife of a stout genial old general, often regarded him attentively, and concluded that though he certainly was a gentleman to all appearances, he might be an adventurer seeking to devour some good match in the present market.

After leaving Malta the fun grew fast and furious. Flirtations in practised hands progressed to the point where vigilance had to rise to the occasion, and the beginners were learning to walk alone. In the glare of day, when the awnings stretched across the deck, and those, who thought of comfortable reading and pleasant siesta, crowded to the shady side, some Joan, whose complexion took a minor position in her thoughts, would accidentally meet her Johnnie in a deserted corner, heedless of the glare. One or two chairs placed side by side in the wheel-house, or beyond the captain's cabin, would

be found to hold two people interested in the same book, or piece of work, or draughts, or chess, or card-tricks, or a thousand and one little artful disguises. Then, when the stars were shining, and the knowing old moon looked down serenely from the blue, blue depths, millions of miles above the topmast, music and dance would add their voluptuous influence, and "eyes would look love to eyes that spoke again," etc., *Da Capo*, to the very beginning since the world began.

Mr. Downs did not dance. He scored one in the favour of the general's wife; "no adventurer would neglect so splendid an opportunity." One evening she beckoned him to a seat beside her.

"Are you a great traveller, Mr. Downs?"

"Oh no; on the contrary. I have never left home before."

"Really." A pause. "Do you know many people in India? Have you letters of introduction?"

Downs might be "raw," as Mr. Logan

had concluded, but he never asked other people these questions about their private affairs; and somehow he resented the inquisitiveness of this particular person, who had frowned, and spoken rather more crossly than he deemed necessary, to a little innocent under her care.

So he answered, in a closing paragraph—

“Oh yes, thank you; all I require in that way. My Indian connection is very small. I beg your pardon, Miss Sylvester; I have taken your chair.” And he rose and changed his place.

Mostly, when the dancing commenced, he would leave the festive scene and drag a chair into some solitary corner amidships, where he could smoke and meditate in peace; and often Mr. Logan or some other non-dancer joined him. Generally Logan would drop desultory remarks on current trifles, and then always hark back to the unfailing subject of his boy. Here he became genuine, and directly he began to

reveal himself, his companion's peculiar faculty for trying to build up the unknown would come into play, and unconsciously he would study Logan.

One of the first things he remarked was, the man's keen anxiety that his boy should be strong and steady. This was so keenly and so continuously displayed, that Willy wondered whether he had developed any remarkably lawless or criminal propensity.

"Why should you always fear for him?" he said. "Has he no mother?"

Logan laughed bitterly.

"Oh yes," he said; "he has his mother, certainly."

One evening another Calcutta merchant entered into conversation with Downs.

"Did you know Logan before you came on board?"

"No."

"Then you won't mind an elderly man giving you a word of warning. Beware of Logan; he has not a reputation for being

over straight. He calls himself a Calcutta merchant, but I don't think that community quite see it. I can't speak from experience, but I know people who have suffered through him. He is a plausible chap; and they say he has the handsomest wife in the three kingdoms."

Then the tall fair girl, with the slender little hand and the large sad eyes, said to him one morning, as Logan passed them—

"Papa says how you must hate having Mr. Logan in your cabin. Do you?"

"No," said Willy, stoutly; "I don't."

"I'm glad," the girl answered softly; "two whist parties last night forgot their games and joined together in abusing him. I always feel inclined to like people when every one jumps on them that way. Poor man! it's hard to have no friends. Nothing to hold you up when you fall down; and some one said last night, his wife was his evil genius—I feel so sorry for him."



CHAPTER VI.

FATE.

VERY bright and sunny had the fickle Mediterranean shown itself during all these days. So much so, that she deemed it incumbent to give the passengers, per *Oriental*, one frown before they parted. When the long low line of the land of Egypt came in sight, the sun had withdrawn, and white surf flashed on the restless hills and vales of the dark grey moaning plain that lay around them.

The pilot was late, and a time of mortal agony ensued. The decks that had borne the trip of dancing feet were now lined with parti-coloured countenances, prostrate

in their woe; while the yard-arms from right to left, and from left to right, were bowing to the sea.

The shore at last was reached in general thankfulness. But then consternation spread among young and old. They heard the journey was to be made across to Suez without delay. No pleasant lingerings at Cairo, no donkey-rides, no pyramids, no petrified forest; they were to go from steamer to Nile boat, from Nile boat to desert caravan, and off to Suez with all speed. What noise and confusion, and dust and dirt; what hideous Nubian men and women; what flies and mosquitoes; what noxious food and general discomfort! Suddenly plunged, as they were, from brightness, sweetness, and light, into the plagues of the land of Egypt.

This was a time of trial and discovery. Unsuspected weaknesses were revealed, and man took severer views of his fellow man, as each struggled for himself on the various

occasions when there was little to be had and a great many wanting it.

The refreshments provided for the wayfarers were not appetizing, and on one occasion Downs, standing at the door of one of the sheds into which the crowd of passengers was jostling, quite regardless of manners, or deference to age or sex, looked with disgust at the banquet—determined to leave his share to any one who could enjoy it—and meanwhile, watched the scrimmage with the eye of a philosopher. Patting complacently the pocket where his pipe reposed beside his tobacco, he felt that he could, with that comfort, weather the storm a little longer.

The tall fair girl, deserted by her father, who had joined in a raid on bottled beer and soda water, had, with the three pretty girls in charge of the general's wife, bravely and laughingly stormed and taken a small table with room for six. The general and his wife, finding their proportions impeded their

progress in the throng, had been somewhat delayed, and before they could reach the vacant places, Mr. Logan and another man had taken possession. Nothing daunted by the irate little lady and her lord, they were making hay while the sun shone.

“Come away, girls ; come at once to some place where there are people whom you know. I can’t leave you here.”

Very reluctantly and petulantly the three gave up their refuge, and one touched the tall girl’s shoulder and said—

“Come, Mary.”

But Mary replied : “I don’t see the least reason for moving from my place.” And as if to apologize for the emphatic rudeness of the elder lady, lifted a dish of something that stood near, and handed it across the table to Logan and his companion.

It was kindly meant and gracefully done, and Mary had no need to repent it. It not only gained her sturdy assistance on subsequent occasions, but it pleased her gentle

mind to think she had been able, so easily, to show ordinary human kindness to one, on whom the rest of her world so persistently turned its back.

One stroke of luck Downs had that journey. Somebody had asked him to take a place in their party for the desert caravan, and he had consented without further thought. When the time came for this new experiment in Eastern travelling, feeling rather cross and weary for want of food, the novelty of the scenes of scramble having begun to pall, he approached the man who had requested his society and asked, pointing to the queer boxes on wheels—

“Have we to be churned in those things?”

His friend's language was emphatic.

“Yes, and be d——d to it,” he said. “I had settled to have only smokers, and a fool of a fellow has let me in for a man and his daughter. The father's a good chap, and says the girl won't mind smoke; but one can't puff all night in a woman's face.”

Downs was full of sympathy and heartily agreed.

But “che sará sará”—and when the seats were occupied he found to his satisfaction that opposite to him, and near the door of the van, sat Mary Leslie beside her father. In the certain anticipation of a miserable night, shaking to bits in their cramped-up car, and denied the dear privilege of tobacco, it was at least a consolation to look at that calm face before him, instead of listening to Miss Sylvester’s perpetual giggle, or Miss Daunt’s unceasing prattle, while the jolt and the jar kept one wide awake.

They started in a long line, amidst shouts and uncouth sounds, the unsavoury vicinity of camels, and the very condensed essence of the plague of flies.

But what a surprise for both Downs and his fair companion, when, in spite of all their uncomfortable forebodings, that night and that dawn became a dream of beauty in their minds for evermore!

The full moon in the clearest deepest heaven that night reveals, the silent road, on which the wheels passed with only a murmur of sound, the long line of caravans, meandering over the glittering plain, looking so mysterious, so unearthly in that wonderful still atmosphere and magic moonlight, that they might have been bearing pilgrims journeying to the land of shadows. And then—the faint first liftings of the portals of the day over the strange outlines of the distant hills! The treeless waste, without a blade of grass or flower, yet clothed in such a wonderful radiance of colouring that came and went in changing hues and ever-growing brightness, until the dark hill-tops flashed into pink fire, and with a sudden burst the sun had risen!

The girl's eyes were full of prayer, and when Willy looked at her for the sympathy he knew was there, she was too absorbed to notice him. He, turning from the visible glory in the eastern sky, saw in memory

that picture which is the religion of a large portion of humanity—the mother with the Infant in her arms, obeying the angel voice heard in a dream, “Arise and flee into Egypt.” Just so the sad eyes might have looked, as if seeing the cross with the light beyond it! A strange yearning into the unknown future passed through Willy’s mind, and from that time a halo seemed to hover over the fair face of this mortal Mary; and even when she came back to the ordinary phases of everyday existence, and laughed and frowned, and ate and drank like other girls, Downs never forgot that he had seen her immortal being looking sadly through its prison bars, out over the desert sand, to the unfailing Source of light and life.

They left Suez on a broiling Thursday afternoon in the beginning of November, and severe experiences began very shortly after they steamed out, into that veritable copper called the Red Sea. They had now

picked up a chaplain, and on the Sunday morning, directly after breakfast, a little church was improvised on the deck, and with Sunday manners and with Sunday faces the passengers one by one began to take their seats.

Willy Downs was looking on just outside the arranged precincts, biding his time, and not far from him stood Logan, also watching the congregation assembling.

Presently Miss Leslie appeared, dressed in a soft white muslin, looking cool, and fresh, and graceful. She carried two books in her hand, and going to where her father was standing, gave him one, and spoke a few words. He smiled at her, and putting another book, which had rather a profane outside, into his pocket, followed and took his seat beside her on one of the benches.

Downs advanced and seated himself in the background, much surprised to find Logan had also joined the ranks. Now Downs had noticed during this rush across

the Isthmus that his acquaintance, Mr. Logan, was on much too friendly terms with the brandy bottle, and he consequently studied to avoid him as much as possible.

On this morning, when the service was over, Logan still kept his proximity, as they walked away, and seemed inclined to enter into conversation.

"Well," he said, "it's many a long day since I did that. Not ten minutes before it began, the first officer said, 'Going to church?' and I said, 'Yes, if you will write the Bible over again, with a new beginning to it to suit my religion better.' And he laughed and went away—and I—went to church."

"What made you change your mind?"

"Miss Leslie."

"Did she alter the Bible to suit you?"

"No, she fixed me firmer in my belief; but I saw two sides to my doctrine."

"What is it?"

"That it was Eve who tempted the

serpent." He said this almost fiercely, with such a change in voice and manner, that Downs turned suddenly to look at him.

Logan noticed it, and spoke bitterly.

"I'm quite sober. I have seen you giving me the cold shoulder lately. I don't blame you; no Eve ever tempted *me* not to do it. Did you see how the major put his French novel in his pocket, and went with his holy book in his hand where the girl led him? I tell you, Downs, if flinging my vile body to be crushed by those devouring engines would secure an Eve like that to tempt my boy, I'd make the plunge without a murmur."

With sincere pity for the man in whom—spite of the combined testimony of many voices, as well as from the results of his own observation—Downs perceived a spark of the living Spirit in this overwhelming affection for his boy, the only reply that he could think of was—

"What are you going to make of him?"

"A rich man," Logan answered. "Money

is power. I can't give him anything better than that. I am going now to make my last heap. I'll take it to him, and if I have any luck, I'll just live within touch of him until I die. And once he is started fair, the sooner *that* comes the better."

"No, Logan, you are quite wrong. Better than all the money in the world is love, and doing right for love's sake. If you don't believe me, ask Miss Leslie."

The fiery rock of Aden safely passed, and desolate Socotra left behind, again the soft breezes and the brilliant atmosphere sent a pulse of lazy enjoyment through all the wayfarers, each after his kind.

Papas, mammas, and guardians, who had been rather remiss in the exhausting weather of the Red Sea, now found their time fully occupied. There were some raids into pleasant corners, and many games of chess or draughts, as well as the more interesting games they covered, came to an untimely end.

Some poor little girls cried, and some

grew rebellious; while the young men stealthily strove to dry the tears and foster the rebellions. The good-natured old people with responsibilities, declared nothing would induce them to take charge of girls again. The mammas acted with due discretion, carefully sorting the wheat from the chaff; while more hardened and contraband performances were severely judged by select committees of elder matrons, and not always decided upon in a just or liberal manner! Meanwhile, Willy Downs had been thinking. His natural disposition, while it drew him towards sentiment, left him quite outside the game of flirtation, so that though the temptation was offered him, he had no difficulty in resisting, and hardly was conscious that he had done so. He had commenced by flitting from flower to flower, but directly one seemed to stand out from the rest, as a selection, he retired. In silent thinking, when mostly all the human freight of that swift vessel was rapt in slumber,

watching the stars dancing in and out of the long straight lines of the rigging, as, with a scarcely perceptible movement, the ship held on her way—he told himself that he was not, socially speaking, on a level with those around him; that the home and parentage so sacred in his memory would be to them a subject of sneer and derision. And he determined that sooner would he put all thought of a certain phase of future happiness from his mind, than venture into a position where his past self would have to be obliterated and forgotten. Every step he took to keep himself aloof, only strengthened his standing in the eyes of those about him, until he almost took the top place as a probable eligible.

Mary Leslie, who was rather hard to please, and had really enjoyed his society, was somewhat piqued at his defection. But the voyage was now drawing to its close, and strengthened for the fray, as he fondly believed, by his self-denying behaviour since

leaving Suez, and armed at all points by his reason, Willy Downs ventured into the arena. He thought he would like to carry away with him a better acquaintance with this fair and gracious young lady, and he conducted his campaign so successfully that, between Ceylon and Calcutta he laid up quite a store of pleasant memories, quite an insight into the mental machinery of a sweet, unselfish womanly nature of the steadfast type. Motherless from her infancy, and brought up by her maiden aunts in a quiet country home, her father, coming back to her as a stranger after she had grown up, had almost taken the place of an elder brother. Now she looked upon her future as devoted to him, and mapped out very clearly for the present, holding herself aloof from all thoughts of completing her own life. just as Willy did for another reason. At last the haven was in sight, and slowly they were steaming up Garden Reach, looking at the well laid out grounds, and palatial

houses that clustered on the banks of the great river. The bustle and excitement was of a new nature. This was the ladies' parade day. Wonderful costumes, lovingly peeped at in their carefully packed cases during the last few days, now adorned the blushing owners. Young, bright, expectant faces were gathering on the deck, most of them looking out for parents whom they could not recognize!

A unique Anglo-Indian scene of the days gone by, before scientific knowledge had defied length of miles and sweep of ocean, when the costume "for landing" was as carefully chosen and considered as a Court dress, and parents and children met as strangers, with timidity on either hand, as facing that which was unknown.

In the pilot-boat, that met them at the Sand-Heads, a large basket of flowers had arrived for the captain, a gay old lady-killer of the most genial type, and he had been presenting bouquets all round.

The evening before Willy had enjoyed a long conversation with Mary Leslie. In view of its being the last, she had spoken with less reserve, and had even confessed how, approaching more nearly to her new life, she longed for the mother she had never known. Willy's answering sympathy and the simple phrase, "I have often thought that our mothers never really leave us," seemed to lift a veil between their corresponding minds, and stamp their intercourse as holding the elements of a mutual understanding, in which none other had a share.

This is the danger signal, when eyes meet eyes with the knowledge of a secret; a word, a touch—a kiss, it may be. Here there was no such tangible fact, but to these two, they being as they were, a far more subtle and attractive charm.

She was standing a little apart when he saw her that morning, with wistful sadness in her face and flowers in her hand, and he quickly joined her.

"Have you any little bag or box not quite strapped down," he said; "it would be a great kindness if you would accept this little copy of Tennyson, which has given us so much enjoyment on the voyage. It has not a very handsome cover, but I have taken the liberty of writing your name in it."

"Oh yes, I shall like to have it, Mr. Downs. Indeed, I thank you! I hope some day you will see it again, and know I have cared for it."

Some day?

"*Prudens futuri temporis exitum,
Calignosa nocte premit Deus.*" *

"I am afraid that is not likely," Willy replied; "but the world is small and full of strange surprises. I know that on the top of my far-away mountain, I shall often remember and—and hope that everything is bright and smiling on your road."

* "Divine wisdom hides the future in the darkness of night."

They walked slowly away as he spoke, and leaving the groups who were looking forward, stood alone near the stern, looking back.

She was untying the flowers she held. She laid them down on a bench beside her, and selecting a red rosebud and a leafy spray, said dreamily—

“Will you not have a flower for your coat—to land in? I think nearly all the gentlemen are wearing them.”

She looked at him, her expression less guarded than usual, but she quickly dropped her lids, and a red as deep as the rose spread over her face.

Willy Down's dark handsome eyes were not dreamy now. He spoke low and hurriedly, but with a well-mastered voice.

“Miss Leslie, in a few seconds I shall have said good-bye, and have vanished from your life. Give me the flower, and press your lips upon it, that it may never die. Give me that of your generous bounty, as

you would give a dying man a glass of water."

She lifted her eyes once more, then bent over the flower with a soft lingering touch, and held it to him.

"Not good-bye," she said; "Addio—which is far better."

He grasped her hand, and was gone.

She looked for him, but only saw him once again, with the distance growing between them. He lifted his hat, and stood bareheaded in the sun, and the mist that "rises from the depth of some divine despair," hid him from her view. . . .

In twenty-four hours' time he was shut up in a long dark green box, and six men, with strange unearthly songs and ejaculations, were bearing him on their shoulders at a rapid pace along a hot and dusty road, outside civilization.





CHAPTER VII.

AN EVIL GENIUS.

WHEN Peters stood in the crowd and watched the vessel that bore the younger man away, it was with a sort of regret that he too was not on board, and a questioning wonder that this phase of exile had never suggested itself before. But the answer was not far to find. First there had been Ben Josephs—poor old Ben!—and now, Harry Barton. No, his work was cut out for him at home, as Downs' work was clearly shaped for him in another country. The lad he had noticed on board was standing near him; and when the crowd broke up, he found himself walking just behind the boy,

and noticed that the pocket of his coat was turned inside out, as if it had been picked.

"Hullo! youngster," Peters said, "I am afraid some one has been at your pocket, the lining is all pulled out. Had you anything in it?"

The boy turned round, and then felt it. "Only a handkerchief," he said, with a knowing wink. "You don't catch me giving them such a chance. I wouldn't like to lose my purse, with father's big tip in it."

"Your father has an aching heart, thinking of you now, I am afraid. I saw him—and I heard him too. Are you going back to school?"

"No; I have a tutor. Mother and I live about a few miles from here in our new house. She's waiting for me now in the town. I expect I'll catch it."

"Well, be a good boy, and remember your father's advice, and take care of your mother until he comes back."

"Take care of mother!" The boy

laughed — a hard laugh. “She takes precious good care of herself; and if she had heard father talk like that, she would have said ‘Skittles.’ But I’ll miss father, I know!”

“Well,” Peters said, “I set my seal to what your father said, ‘keep steady, and you’ll never repent it.’ Keep your love for your father warm in your heart, and be steady for his sake.”

The boy looked up at him. Young as he was, there was a manish shrewdness about him that had the foreshadowing of cunning.

“I suppose you’re a good man,” he said; “but it’s hard to tell. You see, when it suits me, I believe father; when I want to do anything that I’m told not to do, I believe mother; and I know what her opinion is. It doesn’t matter what you do, so long as you’re not found out! Do you live here?”

“No; I’m going to the hotel for my bag, and then to the station.”

“Well, my way is yours, so, if you don’t

mind, I'll walk with you. I know where our carriage is sure to be."

Opposite a millinery depôt of some sort, in a wide street of shops, a carriage was standing; a landau with two horses and two men, all well appointed—bearing the stamp of wealth on every detail, but looking fresh and indescribably *parvenu*. As the boy and Peters came up, a shopman issued, bowing and rubbing his hands. The footman stalked solemnly to open the carriage door and let down the step, and a lady came out, with the mien of a duchess. Halfway across the pavement she stopped to give some last instruction, her head held aloft, her eyes cast down as if she were addressing something quite beneath her. Somehow Peters had expected that the mother without a moral sense would possess an exterior like this; but he did *not* expect that with the first sound of her voice he would recognize the "witch woman" of his ever-lamented youth!

She did not see him, and as she turned toward the boy, Peters, with a quickened step, passed behind her and hastened at his most rapid pace along the street—looking, if possible, taller and grander than usual, the fire of righteous indignation flashing into fresh flame.

“Oh, he’s gone!” the boy said, irrelevantly.

“Who’s gone?”

“The gentleman who walked with me from the docks. Look at him!—look! I should like to be a grand man like that.”

She did look. She paused; and then, shrugging her shoulders, stepped into the carriage, saying with an indifferent tone—

“They’re certainly not common objects of the country.”

It was many a long day before the effect of this encounter took its weight off Peters’ mind, and though he argued with himself that it was superstitious folly, he felt it a very ill omen for poor Downs that his

voyage to a far country should be attended at the start by such evil appearances.

In the first letter he wrote to him, he gave one note of warning.

"I hope you did not see much of that bejewelled man—I know nothing of him except that, issuing from a snake's nest, he is likely to be rather poisonous. I am not an astrologer, and don't know what star you were born under, but I should certainly feel inclined to regard that person as having a malignant influence—so have nothing to say to him."

Willy read this letter—the first from home—with an eager gladness. He paid less heed to this paragraph than to many others. That Peters should be mysterious was a recognized necessity, which did not disturb him; but he smiled to think how harmless poor Logan had been, how many stones had been thrown at him on all sides, and even Peters' condemnation could not drown the gentle meed of pity given to him because "it was so hard to have no friend to help you up when you fell down."

He did not say all of this in his reply, only "that nothing terrible had happened ; and though the poor man was well abused, he had a touch of the better part about him, and was tenderly fond of that rather hard-visaged lad, from whom he had parted at Southampton."

To his dear and honoured squire Willy also wrote, telling him of the strange life and new country — contrasting different methods of farming and treating property generally, moaning over the ruthless destruction of forests, and the terrible waste of water. Also he hoped Miss Doris would honour him by cutting his roses whenever she wanted them.

"How often," he said, " I long that she and Mrs. Holdness, with their great love of flowers, could see the strange beautiful garden outside my door. A short while ago, along the outer roof of my verandah, bundles of dry sticks were hanging up, with a little moss mixed up with them, but after the deluge of rain and mist, and hot fleeting sunshine, these dry sticks have become great masses of colour ; long branches of bloom hang down

from them, some yellow, some purple, some white, and some with feathery blossoms, like butterflies, all curiously marked and of a wonderful delicacy. They grow in a wild state on the trees at the foot of the hills, in low-lying land called the Terai—where big game is also to be found—and my uncle tells me they are called orchids.”

That autumn following Willy's departure, when Peters took his usual journey, he remembered that he had an added interest in the place, and felt curious to see again the little home where his friend's peaceful life had been spent, and note how it looked in the absence of its master—not inspectingly of course, but as a matter of simple interest.

The day after his arrival he had been to Widdbury church, and the beautiful face, that had become the embodiment of all such passionate adoration as can live silently in a man's heart, had once more passed before his vision in its calm sad peace and strength. Her father was walking with a stick, and seemed feeble. At the church door she

smiled and nodded to some of the people standing about, and he heard her voice—

“Mind the step, daddy!”

The simple words kept ringing in his ears, while the memory of that other meeting a year ago, was rushing into his mind, and clashing riotously with the sweet picture he had come here to renew. What but the recollection of that woman, and the brief part he had played in her history, kept him with a gulf lying deep and irretrievable, between him and a nearer intercourse with those to whom he was so strangely bound?

In the quiet of the Monday afternoon he again took his way towards the village. Mr. Downs' home was the first to the left hand, not very far down the hill from the church gate. It stood alone, and all around it and over its front roses were growing. These had now ceased to bloom, with the exception of one climbing variety still covered with autumn riches, the “last roses of summer,” hanging

in soft pink clusters close up under the thatched roof. Peters stopped to admire them over the high hedge that was the boundary on this side, when suddenly he saw the end of a ladder in the air, and heard a fresh young voice—

“Now, Tom, take care! Don’t break the branches, and don’t tumble down or cut your fingers with the scissors.”

“Yes, miss.”

“Let them fall gently as you cut them. I’ll catch them—that’s my business. With long stalks, mind. Don’t look about you with that sort of reckless smile. I know very well what it means, ‘I bain’t such a fool as Miss Doris thinks;’ but people, even boys, do tumble, and ladders do slip, and I’d rather take you back to your mother with all your bits fastened on.”

Then there was silence, and clip, clip, of the big scissors, and desultory ejaculation of fervent admiration as the sweet treasures dropped to the earth. Peters stood still,

undecided whether to go on or turn back up the hill, but the natural yearning took him a step or two further, and then he saw that a pony carriage was at the gate. Squire Ashley was in it, evidently waiting for his granddaughter. His back was turned, so that Peters could not see his face; but his attitude was thoughtful, and indicated either dejection or the feebleness of age.

Presently the girl came down the path, holding out the front of her skirt filled with sweet-scented flowers.

“Just look, granddad,” she said; “they were worth waiting for, were they not? I won’t be a minute now.”

And then Peters had to walk straight on, for she had caught sight of him! There was silence as he passed—the sort of hush that speaks very loud to a shy or nervous person. Peters was neither as a rule, but this was the exception that proved it, and the feeling did not diminish when he heard the girl’s voice—

"That's the man I've seen in church. I wonder who he is."

There was no reply that reached him. He would have given worlds to turn and watch the old man's face or convey to him a portion of the affectionate yearning that filled his heart. The memory of his youth came back to him, and again he saw his mother's face brighten under the pleasant influence of his uncle's genial friendship. He walked on down the street, not daring to look to the right or left, yet conscious of a longing he could not control to catch one glimpse of another presence, one more echo of another voice.

The squire had replied to Doris by a silent regard of the passing stranger, and then he said with a sigh—

"If you were a boy, Doris, I should say run after him and bring him here—he reminds me of some one I would fain see."

If Peters had heard that sentence, it would have given fresh fuel to the fire that was

burning within him. What was to happen now? and without giving up the isolated position he had chosen to assume, could he again risk a visit to Widbury?

He little thought how simple and beyond his control was the pathway that stretched before him; he little guessed how and why his next journey there would be undertaken! There lay the closed roll of the future, so shortly to be unfolded, in which irrevocable Wisdom had decreed the answer to his heart's fervent prayer, the accomplishment of his life's purpose.





CHAPTER VIII.

PEACE AND PASSION.

DRIVING home from the meet one mild morning in January, Letty and her aunt had been led in conversation, personal and otherwise, to the land of the sun, and Mrs. Graham was expatiating on the careless bright existence people led there; how bills and poverty kept in retirement—butchers, bakers, and grocers, seemed to be all settled with the faintest shadow of consciousness that they even existed, or were ever required. And the excessive heat, which often seemed unendurable while it lasted, made it possible to realize a joy, that was unknown to happy creatures who had never suffered.

She described the ineffable delight of the first breath of cool air, the early autumn evenings, when the smoke lay low over the native villages, and ordinary sounds began to take a different note in the changing atmosphere. Still through all there seemed to stay that strange unconquerable home longing, felt even in the midst of enjoyment, the something missing that never could be filled in, until one was back in the mist and the rain, under the cold cloudy skies of the old country.

They were driving through a neighbouring village as they spoke, and children were pouring out of school, and men coming in to dinner—the midday stir in and out of the quiet cottage doors.

“It must be different,” Letty said. “I should miss my poor people. Did you ever visit among the poor there?”

Mrs. Graham laughed.

“No, my dear. They would not have understood me, and I certainly knew only

one language for them, and that was 'piça,' what you would call pennies. Call me heathen, dear child, but really it is quite impossible to think of those creatures as humans like ourselves—they are *not*. I don't care what the missionaries say, they are more than half animals. I speak of what *you* call poor people."

"But in all these years, Aunt Lettice, has our influence done nothing to make them better?"

"I don't fancy so; and if one only thinks of proportions, how could a little handful of civilization do much with such a teeming population, ignorant of not only our language, but our way of thinking, and our codes of laws, and manners and everything? Every thought that comes into their minds, so far as they have one, must be at the furthest point in variance with ours."

"Then why have they let us stay there so long, like monarchs of all we survey?"

"They are indolent and they are cowardly;

and the upper classes in that part of the country I know—I have never been far north, I believe they improve as they get colder—are a race of pleasure-loving indolent men, mostly very fat. Of course there are exceptions, but one seldom sees them. They look cruel, too. I went once, at Benares, to see a tiger in the possession of a Nawab. It was in a very poorly protected cage, and I pointed out the weak bars to some one with us, and he said, ‘The creature, fortunately for us, does not know its power.’ I looked up at the Nawab, and it struck me he was looking at me with eyes just like the tiger. It gave me a shudder. I was young then, and I often thought afterwards ‘fortunately for us, they don’t know their power.’”

“It’s very incomprehensible, too,” said Letty. “We take kingdoms—as big as our own three put together—into possession, and just walk in and sit down, and no one dreams of remonstrating.”

“Well, William says we have this safeguard; the men whom we have partly civilized and who have come to be devoted to our rule, are the Sepoys of the Indian Army, and they are ready to uphold all we do. They certainly seem to have an enthusiastic affection for the ‘Raj’ as they call it, and you see there are no other real soldiers in the country except our own men.

“I wrote an Indian letter for daddy last week. Oh, Aunt Lettice, how I wish dear Robert had not died. I never knew the whole depth of that loss until lately; but I know daddy is fretting about things, and I can’t bear to think he is feeling so old as to be unquiet about the future. Have you thought him looking ill or troubled?”

“Well, yes, perhaps; a little more than usual. But then the attack of lumbago in the autumn would account for that. I believe it is the most depressing of all things. See, there he is up the little walk,

let us get out of the carriage and meet him. He is walking very well ! ”

“ Yes, do go, dear Aunt Lettice ; I’ll join you afterwards. I have something to look after that I had forgotten. Dinner-party to-night, you know. You always cheer him up, and he likes some one to admire his pet plantation.”

The squire was looking after his trees ; the continuation of a picturesque wooded belt that crowned the high ground to the east side of the park.

“ Well, Lettice,” he said, advancing to meet her, “ I used to call this my nursery once, but my babies have grown rather faster than we have. I love this wood. I hope no ruthless axe will be laid about these roots. It wants no thinning now ; nor for ages to come. All embryo giants these.”

He tapped them with his stick on the hard-sounding trunks, and then added thoughtfully—

“ You’ve seen it in spring, carpeted with

primroses, violets, and wood-sorrel. We used to bring our lunch here in a basket, just after we were married, and watch the boys from the village while they dibbled the little wild plants in all over the place; and then we would saunter home—planning things. Over forty years ago, Lettice, and the trees flourish, and the flowers blow, year after year, but I feel very old—and——”

“Yes, Harry, their life is renewed year by year, as you say; and, as the poet says, the knowledge should—

‘Hearten trust in that which made the world so fair.’”

Then, with a gentle tact she had of following a speaker's thoughts, instead of branching off on her own line, “Have you heard nothing of your nephew lately?”

“Nothing; and the question is a complex one. Even if I could find him I could not ask him to come here without telling Letty everything; and—his coming—she could not bear it. Her life has been so beautiful, so

strong, so devoted. I would not disturb its peace and calm for worlds."

Mrs. Graham interrupted him.

"I don't agree with you," she said. "I don't think you take in all the elements of her character. You forget her love for you ; her great affection for her poor cousin. Would it not be better to speak to her openly?"

"Oh no. God bless her! My poor child! There is no need for re-opening the subject—and he begged me not to do it. Hush! here she comes. It is a joy to see her—even in the distance."

As the spring approached, Mr. Ashley recovered his health and spirits to a great extent, and the brothers-in-law for awhile changed places. The colonel, by some accidental handling of a gate, had his leg broken, and was unable to resume his active life for some time. He was very patient, however, and the continued stay at Shirley, which his lameness involved, was welcomed by all the

family. He and his wife had never settled down. They lived a sort of roving life—taking short trips abroad, or to Scotland, or Ireland, and looking upon “town,” that refuge of the homeless, as their headquarters.

“No,” Mrs. Graham would reply, when people asked her, “But don’t you long to settle down in a house of your own?” “No, I certainly don’t. William has his club, and I have my brougham, libraries, art, science, music. If the town is dull and dirty, there are lots of picture galleries at a shilling each. I can change my books as often as I like. I can go to any church that pleases me. If we settle down, as you call it, the furniture would be new, the library empty; we should have carriages and horses, only to drive about and make new friends in our old age; servants would be a trouble to the inexperienced, and—above all—we should have a parish, and be obliged to sit under some reverend gentleman, even if we didn’t like him.”

At the same time she loved the country, and Shirley was free from all these disadvantages; so she was enjoying herself to the top of her bent. Sometimes, when the Indian mail came in, she and the colonel would have grave moments over private letters and public news; for a growing anxiety was beginning to be felt by all old Indians, or those who were interested in them. Colonel Graham's eagerness to rush up to town, and get all the latest intelligence and details, foiled his own purpose, and caused a delay in the setting of the bone, which had been so obstinate about mending.

It was on a lovely June morning, when the roses were bursting into flower, and a large party of visitors had assembled in the breakfast-room at Shirley Hall, that the climax to these doubtful rumours from our eastern empire was first proclaimed. The colonel, having to keep his leg in a straight position, was on a couch by the window.

Doris and a pretty girl of her own age, who was on a visit, had been attending to his wants with some playful repartee and bright young laughter.

"Now, Evelyn," Doris said, "go and take your breakfast, and leave off flirting with my uncle. I've a dish for him here that always makes him so greedy; he won't take his eyes from it until it's finished."

She was holding her hands behind her, and gradually raised them with what they held above her head.

"The Indian Mail!" cried the colonel. "Oh, give it to me, child."

"There! Look at his face. We have positively no chance against a newspaper!"

They had hardly taken their places, when an exclamation, almost a groan, burst from him, and suddenly stilled the small talk that was going on.

At last "the Bengal tiger had discovered its strength."

“Troops at Meerat have risen and murdered their officers. Women and children cruelly massacred.”

So the shell burst that morning in many a British home. A scare to some, a wound to others, a passing thunderclap to many. And the world went on its way as it always will—rejoicing with those that rejoiced, and leaving those who wept to their own hearts bitterness.

Colonel Graham was stupified and unbelieving. It was more than he could credit. Helpless and fettered, he longed to leap “large lengths of miles” and find himself among his own men once more. The brave men who had cheerfully shared his dangers so often? Never, never could they so disgrace their colours, and their old commander.

Mrs. Graham, in the solitude of her room, on her knees beside her bed, her thoughts a chaos, her cry without a formula, was trying to shut out from her mind the vivid picture of that awful Sunday morning. The

church, the parade ground, the uniform she knew so well; the cruel glare of the May morning sun, brave faces flashing defiance on an overwhelming foe, and then—the end.





CHAPTER IX.

THE HIDDEN SPECTRE.

PETERS was in a deep study. The morning was glorious, warm, and balmy. The tide was out, and dark rocks and anemone-fringed pools of water, with beds of green seaweed here and there, gave a varied colouring between the strip of pale sand and the glittering moving field of waters that lay beyond.

He sat on the keel of an upturned boat. Letters were in his hand, and he looked out to sea along the pathway of light with a wistful and sad countenance.

One letter was from Willy Downs, written on the heights of the far Himalayas, but

bringing to the mind of his correspondent thoughts of things that lay next door to him, and sang perpetually a dirge of questioning in his ears.

“I had a letter from Shirley, written last Christmas by Mrs. Holdness at her father’s wish. She said he had been far from well, and was easily tired. I am glad I went to see him. I could not tell you about it then, for it was too recent, and I was feeling very tender at the thought of our parting and of his last words. I told you in my last of my uncle’s death. Affairs are almost settled here, and after taking my aunt to see her daughter, and visiting one or two of the famous places, I think we shall find our way back to the dear old home. She has no longer any wish to remain out here.”

This letter was dated March, and had evidently been delayed in its journey through the post, for the marks were very numerous, and the Calcutta stamp bore date in May.

Taken up by the perusal of his letter, he had not opened the paper, and was still dreaming over the different thoughts that had been set in motion by the contents of this far-journeying and long-tarrying epistle,

when Harry Barton joined him. The boy stood silent beside him for a moment. Then he said—

“You haven’t opened your paper, Flint.”

Peters looked up.

“No,” he said, “I’ve had a letter from Downs which attracted me more. What’s the matter? Has your pet C. C. been beaten?”

“Not that—it’s the news from India; but I’m so glad you’ve had a letter.” And then together they read over the fateful paragraph.

With a shudder, Peters crushed up the paper in his hand, and threw it from him.

“Oh, why am I here!” he said. “I feel as if I could face hundreds single-handed, with a giant’s strength, to avenge those weak and helpless victims.”

And such was the spirit that awoke in many a brave man’s heart that day throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom. It kindled and flashed from shore to shore,

like the beacon-fires of old. It gave strength to the weak, and cunning to the strong, until the few were conquerors over the many, and the glorious old banner was borne aloft without a stain, while the Hydra of treachery, cowardice, and fanaticism, crawled away to the ignominy of its dishonoured and blood-stained grave.

The startling shock that paragraph gave to all the civilized world, was no mere blow whose severity wore off and was quickly forgotten. It was but the little cloud that came before the terrible and devastating storm, the cloud that grew darker and more dark through many months of waiting, while the public machinery was set in motion, and dire necessity gave an impetus to every science, and every resource that wealth and ingenuity could devise, to span the distance between the mother-country and her children hemmed in by foes. Many individual lives were one long strain of anxious craving, to lift the veil from the fate of those beloved

ones the dark cloud had encompassed, and hidden in its shroud.

Shut out from all communication with the outer world, not knowing the very fate of their neighbours, little isolated garrisons, dotted here and there over the immense area of a burning land, held out against fearful odds, with the courage of endurance that had no excitement of battle and moving scenes to sustain it, only the weary anxiety, the daily monotony of suffering, and seeing suffering. The cross of honour rests over many a valiant heart, to tell of brilliant deeds and well-earned praise; but for the bravest deeds of all in that dark day no laurel crowns were meted out. The simple acts of self-denial and self-restraint, the cup put away from the parched lips that the children and women might have a deeper draught, the scant hours of rest foregone for the sake of a weaker comrade; thousands of unknown and unchronicled acts, that never found their way to the light, but were

the strong links in the chain of brotherhood, that made so stout a stand for home and country!

Here and there, as opportunity offered, written messages would be trusted to runners, who, hiding them about their persons, would, for hope of reward, run the risks of carrying them to their destination. Such a letter reached Mr. Ashley in the winter of '57. Folded into a little packet about an inch square, written on a scrap of paper with faded ink, and stained and worn after months of wandering, it had reached the firm in Calcutta to which it was addressed, and had been promptly forwarded.

What eager interest it excited at Shirley, and at Widbury, and Nether Melcombe!

“DEAR AND HONOURED SIR,

“I am with a small party of English in a large house. We can defend ourselves for some weeks, until help arrives; but we cannot get away. There are ladies and children here—so brave, so quiet, may God have pity on them! My aunt is in a fortified place some miles away—safe, I hope. If she should come home

without me, I have asked her to live in my dear home. I think of all with love and prayer, but though our situation seems desperate, we still hope. I am sending this letter and one other by a messenger. It is only a sort of experiment. I cannot say more."

To Meaton the passing months brought no further tidings, and that autumn Peters had, out of his kind-heartedness, foregone his usual visit to Widbury.

Harry Barton had implored of him to stay. The sadness of the lad's surroundings at home had so intensified, that he seemed to cling to his old friend for all the comfort and brightness of his young life; and not only this, but Peters' presence had now become a daily renewed and looked-for event in the Cliff House.

When the year had completed itself after Willy Downs' departure, Mrs. Barton had constantly made inquiries about him, and Peters, quite oblivious of the packet entrusted to him—but which Willy had never mentioned—was somewhat at a loss to ac-

count for this interest in his absent friend ; and presently, to his further surprise, he found that interest was greatly concentrating on himself.

One day Mrs. Barton had watched him for a long time, while standing talking to Harry at the gate. Poor Mr. Barton was lying there as usual, only half-conscious of what was around him, fast sinking into that apathetic death in life which is the saddest of all the lingering farewells—to those who can do nothing but patiently await the end, and even pray for it.

When Harry came in, there was an unusual flush upon his mother's face, and her eyes had a strange excited look.

"Harry," she said, "tell me, where does Mr. Peters come from? Where do his people live?"

"I don't know, mother," the boy replied. "He always says he has no family but the whole human race."

She was silent, but her words, after a long,

long pause, gave a key to the steady line of thought in which she had been indulging.

"I wish he would come in with you sometimes. I should like to know him better."

Very eagerly Harry accepted this suggestion, and the next day the series of visits commenced that became to Peters a matter of humane interest.

What was the devouring and corroding secret that wrapped up this woman's life in its deadly folds? Not only the painful ever-present sorrow, patent to all—that bitterness she had indeed tasted to the dregs—for now the ruin lay there, the wrecked frame of the once powerful man, but no look of love rewarded her constant care, scarcely was he aware of her presence. Only when the boy spoke or moved near him, a look of intelligence would faintly dawn in the faded eyes, and the lips would murmur some whisper of recognition. Not for her—oh, never, never again on this side the dark river, for all her

love, for all her care, for all her life's devotion, would come a reply, or token, or sound. Sometimes it would almost seem as if she were going to tear the veil from her hidden spectre, and then her eyes would resume their cold fixed sadness.

One day the invalid was restless, he had passed a wakeful night and seemed in suffering. Peters had preceded Harry in his return home, and found poor Mrs. Barton in deep distress, unable to quiet her husband or settle him comfortably, and Peters' assistance was of no avail.

"Harry will be here presently," he said.

The very name seemed to have some influence, and when the boy came and stood beside the couch, his touch upon the sick man's hand had the healing power, and immediately he seemed to fall into rest and ease that promised slumber.

Peters and Mrs. Barton moved into the adjoining room. In it there was a brighter light, and he was shocked to notice the

terrible havoc that the past year had made on her always pale and careworn face.

Meeting his glance of pity as she seated herself, her face flushed, and then she bent her head on her arms, flung rigidly with tight-clasped hands across the table near her, and sobbed convulsively without a sound.

Oh, what a tale it told, that quiet weeping ! A tale of lonely unshared misery, of solitary vigil, alone with God and her heart's sorrow. It was a difficult situation for Peters, and it hurt him like a physical pain.

"Oh, don't," he said ; "please, don't."

She raised her head, and a mingled look of sorrow and defiance crossed her face.

"He loved me once, and it's nothing to him now that my heart is breaking."

"That is only the accident of his phase of illness. Be sure he loves you still—he loves you through your child."

She drew a sharp, short breath, hid her face in her hands and moaned.

"Not that, not that. God is just !"

He took up a book and turned over its pages, giving her time to recover herself, and after a few moments she said—

“ You love Harry, Mr. Peters ? ”

“ I do.”

“ Do you love him enough to make a great sacrifice for his sake ? ”

“ I think so. What do you mean ? ”

“ The time may come. Swear to me now, if I die to-morrow with all my sins and sorrow on my head, you will guard that ray of comfort for him—my poor husband—and never deprive him of it till his sad life is finished. Sometimes thoughts come in my mind, but I dare not say, not yet—not yet. God give me patience. I only ask your promise, for something tells me, ‘ you swear and swerve not ? ’ ”

“ Swear and swerve not ? ”

As he walked home, the words rang in his ears. An old motto—yes! But how had Mrs. Barton picked it up? Many a time had his mother, the last of her race, told him

of those words, roughly carved on the old oak chimney-board in the living-room of her grandfather's farm. Once, he had journeyed into the far east of England, to look upon the place his mother had loved so well. It had passed into a stranger's hands, and the curious old carving had been removed.—Some day he thought he would ask Mrs. Barton how she had learnt those words. It seemed an easy way to solve the question, but the time never came, though the solution was at hand.





CHAPTER X.

THE GROWING CLOUD.

HAD some Mahatma, from a neighbouring Thibetan monastery, enlightened Willy Downs as to the mischief for which he was unknowingly preparing a foundation, many links in the chain of events composing this history, would have been left out. As it was, Mahatmas had not then been discovered, and the sweet image of Mary Leslie had left a dazzling ray that obliterated minor facts. So it happened that poor Mrs. Barton's packet had been forgotten!

The tea estate on Lumbapahar, belonging to Mr. Jordan, was some miles from the little station of Darjeeling, where the military

and civil authorities dwelt. Willy's feelings had been so acutely drawn towards the knowledge of social distinctions, that it had become a sensitive point with him to keep proudly to himself; therefore of the society there he knew nothing, but he had made him friends of mountains, and tasted keen joys such as those only know who can hold converse with nature.

His uncle's health, failing when he arrived, grew rapidly worse, and Mrs. Jordan, occupied by grave cares and sadder thoughts, lost all her inclination for society, and ceased to suggest that her nephew should accompany her, when attending the various social gatherings she so much enjoyed.

The door of Willy's room opened into the north verandah, looking straight on the far-famed "Kunchingga" — Mount Everest had not as yet asserted superiority. Between him and the everlasting snows lay deep mysterious valleys and tree-crowned hills, range after range rising higher, and grow-

ing more dreamy and ethereal, until they shaded off into pale grey slopes, and rose all glittering white and radiant up into the unfathomable depth of space. How the sunlight lingered, and crowned the mighty king of lofty peaks with a ruby diadem that glowed intensely in the upper air, while all the humid darkening world around lay dim in twilight, and across the very sky—there fell the shadow of a monarch of the snow! And how the morning leapt to greet him, to kiss his unsullied brow, as he emerged majestic from the dark. What magic colours came and went in the myriad valleys beneath, when the mists were furled at the coming of the dawn, and the sudden flash that heralded the sun, widened and crept lovingly down the transparent slopes, until the world and the dwellers therein were waking to a new day!

And nature here had other moods almost more beautiful and fascinating than these, when the grand distance was blotted from

the scene for weeks as though it were not, and all around was an ever-moving changing shroud. At times, nothing but uncertain phantom cloud, hiding away the world a few yards ahead, and then a whirl, and a rift, and ghosts of giant trees and strange rocks, grotesque and weird in this transforming medium, would pass into sight for a few moments, and then softly fade away like dreams.

His uncle's death was quiet and painless. It had been an acknowledged probability for so many months before it occurred, that there was little or nothing to arrange. The old man had faced his future boldly enough, and made every provision to save worry and trouble to those whom he left behind. Mrs. Jordan placed herself, with a sense of complete reliance, in the hands of her sympathetic and beloved nephew.

It was with feelings of mingled regret and pleasure that Willy Downs turned his back on the glorious range of hills, where he had

spent the last eighteen months of his existence. During all this time, and in all these surroundings, he had been schooling himself in a hard lesson, and that was that he had met his kindred soul, that one ray of recognition had flashed between them, and they had, of necessity, drifted apart for ever. His task henceforth was, not to forget, but to remember, to bear with him always the memory of a presence, that was never likely to lose its ideal grace and become the dear half of his workaday world. So, by dint of thinking, and dreaming, and reasoning, and teaching himself in his own peculiar fashion, he succeeded in nourishing and keeping alive a little spark that, by this treatment, grew into a consuming fire. While he argued with himself that all was for the best, and that he was content it should be so, he longed, with every pulse of his heart, to look once more in Mary Leslie's eyes. He would not have confessed it, even to himself, but the thought of such a possibility was a very

important factor in helping his aunt's decision to travel up to Allahabad, and see her daughter and grandchildren before leaving India for good.

Both of them, from their own standing-points, regarded the new future as a sort of interlude or transition state, leading to something which was to follow. Mrs. Jordan still dreamt of the old red house near Upper Melcombe, where in a peaceful old age, with her daughter and her daughter's husband, she would watch her grandchildren growing up around her. To Willy the interlude pointed indefinitely, but he felt in haste to complete it; and while the journey lasted, the strange modes of travelling, the attraction of novelty and picturesque surroundings, lost much of their charm in the weary sense of slowness they inspired.

They started from Lumbapahar with their strange retinue one morning in the end of March. Their personal baggage, their bedding and necessary stores for provision

en route carried by their hired Bhootia coolies in that appalling fashion, which strikes a civilized mind with horror at first sight; that is to say, the heavy weight laid on the bending back, sustained and supported by a band which passes across the forehead. It leaves a weary suffering look on every countenance; the babies even have the prophetic lines of future burdens on their poor little faces. For these people life seems to have no further interest. They eat, and sleep, and carry the heavy loads up and down steep and narrow roads; take their poor remuneration of a handful of coppers; and renew the task from day to day. Living among the grandest scenes of nature, leading the lives of beasts of burden—men, women, and children alike—yet linked to the great brotherhood of man by the same appealing cry through darkness to the unknown—the All-Father. Milan and Cologne have their cathedrals, so has many another great city, while almost every village in a civilized

community has its church spire pointing above. The Bhootias have no churches. They have priests, who, for a consideration, will turn the handle of their praying-wheels, that some poor sinner's aspirations may revolve in the sight of a mysterious spirit whom he names "God." But the cathedrals of the Bhootia race *do* stud the lonely slopes of the remote majestic Himalayas. They have found no place, no style in architecture—but often, in the neighbourhood of a cluster of rude smoke-encompassed huts, which for the nonce is a village, and has a name, you may find them. Groups of tall sticks only, and tied to the top of each, a strip of cloth—cloth of all colours, white, red, blue, purple, but chiefly white, torn from some poor wanderer's raiment, and left to speak its purport to the whispering wind that flies along the mountain solitudes; for every breeze that lifts these poor flags, wings a prayer to rise on its destined way to that point where all converge—the Te Deum

Laudamus and the Miserere, be it borne on the strains of the mighty organ—or fluttering from the Bhootia's simple banner.

It is probable, however, that strong language rather than prayerful aspiration might have been the translation of the wild jabber of this wild people, as they fought and scrambled for the lightest weights, on the occasion of that start from Lumbapahar!

Mrs. Jordan, very tearful and depressed, went on her precarious way in the sedan or doolie of the locality, which she had in a former letter curtly, but accurately, described as "a bit of carpet tied on a stick." Willy had his pony led behind him, but preferred to use his own legs down the narrow road, with thousands of feet of yawning precipice to left of him, and inaccessible, fern-covered, wondrous walls on the other hand. The keen air, the sense of such quick movement as his own active limbs could bring him, was pleasant and satisfying, and yet he lingered now and then to fill his mind with the

beautiful pictures he would never see again.

On reaching the foot of the hills they changed their Bhootias, in their ample but filthy garments, for the naked and greasy Hindoo, and their mode of travelling, for that species of torture called bearer-dāk. Here the victim, enclosed in a lofty coffin with sliding panels on either side, and slung on a strong pole, is churned along a highway on the shoulders of six or eight men, whose feet raise clouds of smothering, choking dust.

How regretfully poor Willy recalled the mail coach of his youth, as reaching the successive stages of their journey the human animals collected round them to relieve the other human animals that had jogged and grunted over the last ten or fifteen miles. In the daytime there was scorching heat—for it was the beginning of April now—and black nude figures ran along-side, their well oiled and unsavoury bodies glistening in the dazzling sunlight. At night the torchlights

would appear, with the smoke and the smell that could compete with most things for a front rank in abominations! Very trying were the long pauses when the men stopped to drink and smoke, gurgling over the native pipe or hubble-bubble, and very weird the sudden silences, broken only by the wild cry of the jackal, and, not unfrequently, by the pathetic voice of his companion calling to the chief of her retinue of servants—who travelled in like manner with themselves—to remonstrate at some unnecessary rest. Then again would rise the deafening din of mingled voices, the sudden hoist into the air, and the jolting would be once more renewed.

After a few days, they again changed their mode of progression. On reaching the sandy banks of the great Ganges, they saw two boats awaiting their arrival. One painted green and gold, with a flat-roofed room and venetian windows, the other a moving hut of thatched straw. The first, simply a com-

fortable house-boat ; the second to serve as kitchen and servants' dwelling. These contrivances had to be tugged up stream for a considerable distance, and for this purpose relays of more human animals were arranged along the bank. It was certainly cooler and more comfortable than the infliction from which they had escaped ; but there were many obstacles *en route*—sandbanks lying in wait several times a day, from which they could not be extricated without babels of confusion ; and every night, at sunset, their floating home would be fastened to the bank until daybreak. Often during the day, they would pass some pretty green and shady bend in the river while they were in mid-stream, but, by some arrangement of their conducting power, each halt was near an arid, sandy, treeless, and desolate spot, often with high banks taller than their flat-roofed boat. Here on this upper deck they would sit of an evening after they had dined, with a dreary stillness all round, only the lap of

the water against the boat's sides, as the great river flowed unhasting, unresting, to the sea.

Sometimes their halting-place would be a strip of strand, bearing occasionally the impress of naked human feet, but always wrinkled and stamped by the great claws of the birds of prey, or the tracks of prowling beasts from the inland jungle.

This weary work lasted only a few days, and then they touched civilization once more. They had not lingered on their way, and during the long journey, had held but little intercourse with Europeans. They were, however, awakening to the fact that their countrymen, in the vast plain they were traversing, were beginning to look into the coming hot weather with strange forebodings and undefined fears, as rumours of disaffection in the native army began to gain ground. Each stage of their progress, as it had filled the old lady with deadly fear, had renewed the energy of her companion, and made him

anxious to press on. Being strangers in the land, the uncomfortable rumours bore to them a more important meaning; and they wondered at the careless levity with which the scattered inhabitants in general spoke of coming trouble. For the strangest part of that strange outbreak in 1857 was the slowness and reluctance with which the white population came to believe in their danger.

At Monghyr Mrs. Jordan had friends, with whom they remained until a steamer, passing up from Calcutta, took them on their farther way.

After leaving Monghyr, there was at least the steam machinery, with its smoke and noise, to persuade them that they were moving more rapidly; but still the great unwieldy vessel would stick on the shallows once or twice a day, and the time seemed unending until their destination was reached, and Willie breathed more freely, to know that his aunt was safe with her own kith and kin.

Amy, the little child, whom he remembered in Widbury years ago, was now the mother of two children, and seemed very happy in her Mofussil home, in spite of all the drawbacks over which his aunt still constantly lamented. Her husband was a Captain Horton. He was in one of the Native Infantry Regiments, stationed in Allahabad, and a staunch advocate of the Sepoy.

Downs' idea now was to start on a tour and see the famous places of which he had read and heard so much, and, so to time his return journey, as to reach Allahabad when the Ganges was in full flow, and then take his aunt to Calcutta, bound for England once more. This was his idea; and his ideas were always encompassed with dreams,—this one with a sense of incompleteness. When he thought it over, and wondered what the incompleteness was, his inner consciousness replied, "But when shall I meet her?"

Amy and her mother strongly opposed the plan on account of the weather, and also because they thought it better to wait and see if "things settled down."

Young Horton laughed.

"The heat won't hurt you," he said, "if you're not too thirsty; and as for 'things settling down!' why, it's only old women's croaks."

Alas! when the news from Meerut reached Allahabad, his reading of the "croaks" was somewhat different.

Then followed here, as elsewhere, those terrible weeks of suspense and pause; the treacherous enemy couching for a spring; the victims half on guard, wholly self-confident; some anticipating perhaps a struggle, others, unable to grasp the necessity for caution or preparedness, blindly trusting in a tradition that was daily proving itself played out and unreliable.

Late on the evening of the 5th of June, a young railway engineer, named Mears,

rode hastily up to their quarters in the fort. Captain Horton was at the Lines, but Mrs. Horton called him in.

“You look troubled,” she said. “Has anything happened?”

He answered gaily in the negative, but got off his horse, and told the syce (groom) to walk it about.

“Can I speak to your cousin out of hearing of the servants?”

She led him into an inner room, lighted only from the top, which was cool and dark, and further removed from the verandah, where the usual domestics sat, and she called out in a cheery voice, “Willy, come here. Mr. Mears has come to see you!”

Her sad little face belied her cheerful manner, and she added, *sotto voce*, “I must stay and hear what it is!”

“All right; but remember want of caution may cost many lives.”

Willy had been pacing up and down his own room, fretting over his life of inaction,

and longing to find something to do, when he heard his cousin's voice, and quickly replied by appearing.

"Downs, will you join a rescue party?"

"Yes, surely," said Willy, promptly.

"Have you weapons?"

"My gun and a pistol."

"Come down to our chief's quarters in half an hour. Put a few things into any small bag you can strap on. We'll fit you out. A native servant, whom we believe to be loyal, has brought us news of trouble not very far off. Some ladies and children, and two or three men, shut into a large house, and harassed by armed villagers. We want to try and join them, and help them to hold out until assistance comes. There are bad rumours Benares way, and these poor people may be in dreadful straits—two or three can be spared from here without any difference. I and two others have leave. By-the-by, don't let your servants know anything about it. We must keep it as

quiet as we can, and there is no time to be lost."

On Willy Downs watch-chain hung a small key unused for months past. It was the key of that small bag whose limited contents had hampered him so much at Meaton, during his brief visit to Peters. India so alters ones arrangements as to these personal matters, that shortly after his arrival at the tea-plantation on Lumbapahar, he had locked the bag and fastened the key carefully about him; but all his other boxes, keys, etc., reposed in the care of his bearer. Now, in his need, he remembered his bag; he also remembered—why he had locked it so carefully; and realized with a pang of remorse that Mrs. Barton's parcel, resting in that bag ever since he left England, had been utterly forgotten by him; indeed more than six months had passed since it should have been despatched to its destination, whatever that might be! There was no time to pause and think it over now, so

he determined that he would add the few things he could not dispense with, and take the bag, parcel and all, wherever he was going, and would send an explanation on the first opportunity. He wrote a few lines for his aunt, not wishing to agitate her or excite her curiosity by an interview, and gave these to his little cousin as he grasped her hand in farewell. She tried to smile through her tears.

“Oh, Willy,” she said, “if mother and the children were safe, I shouldn’t mind it half so much. Good-bye! God guard you, dear!”

He turned back to look at her, standing in the glare, with her hand held up to shade her eyes.

* * * * *

Before another day had closed, her brave young husband, and five of his brother officers, lay dead on the parade-ground outside the fort, shot down by the men in whom they had placed implicit trust.



CHAPTER XI.

IN DIRE EXTREMITY.

THAT night, a little before midnight, five men with their lives in their hands, left the fort and the cantonment of Allahabad behind them, and taking a north-easterly direction, walked at their swiftest pace along the road toward Jounpore, until they reached a large nullah or watercourse, when they left the highway, and following the course of the dried-up stream, held on in the same direction. Four were Europeans, and one a native. They had fifty miles of difficult road before them, but their courage was high, their action had been prompt, and the hope of successfully accomplishing their

task filled them with an energy that even the stifling hot air of the still oppressive night could not subdue. When the day had well commenced, their guide led them to an empty hut for shelter, and brought them bread, and eggs, and goat's milk and water. After this frugal fare, they lay down on scraps of matting, which he had procured, and slept soundly, in spite of heat, mosquitos, and sand flies. Directly the light began to wane, they started once more on their road, and this time Downs, finding himself on a pretty level track, and in the companionship of Mears, took the opportunity of gleaning a little information.

"Tell me," he said, "who is the guide? and where is he taking us?"

"Our guide is bearer in the service of a man I know well—a military man in civil employ. It seems they were rather late in their camping out, and this fellow got wind of what was up, and told his master, who at once pushed on for Allahabad. His police-

guard became so unmistakably impertinent, that for the safety of the ladies with him he drove on, making the heat his excuse, and leaving the camp to follow. They were attacked by villagers, some hours after, got off by great good luck, and found refuge in a large house on an opium plantation, where they have barricaded themselves; but, as this fellow says, they could not hold out ten minutes, if by chance mutineers from Benares, or Azimghur came this way, and the people imagine Marlock, this opium man, to be very rich, so they are looking forward to pickings. The bearer offered to come on to look for help, and here we are."

"Are there many women?"

"Two that I know of. Mrs. Marlock and the child, and Leslie's daughter."

"Leslie's daughter!" Where should he meet her? There was nothing indefinite about Willy Downs' plans now—he spoke no more. To give him his due, he had been doing his utmost all along, refusing to enter-

tain an idea of wearying until the goal was in view ; but the limit to his utmost was realized with a feeling of hopeless pain.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when Budloo Bearer halted his party under some trees, and, pointing to a grove, that lay dark on their right, said—

“The house is there ; the village lies on the other side. I will go. When you see a light up there three times, come towards it. I will meet you, and show you the way. Be very quiet ! Do not speak or smoke !”

Everything was as still as death. It was hard to believe in the necessity for caution, hard to persuade themselves of the fact that danger was lurking all round. It seemed an age before the signal appeared ; and in the intervals of its recurrence their wearied eyes, so eagerly watching, seemed scarcely reliable. After straining so long through the darkness, sparks and flashes kept dancing before them like false lights, until they almost feared to lose what they were waiting

for. At last three steady lights distinguished themselves from the phantom fires, and in a body, without a word, cautiously and silently, the four men pressed forward in Indian file. At the edge of the grove Budloo awaited them. Without speaking, he put his hand to his belt and touched his pistol, as if to warn them all to be in readiness. He then pointed over the low wall of the enclosure to the cleared space round the house, where, at intervals, groups of sleeping men were lying on the ground. Passing through a gap, he led the way, the others following him. They passed along a shady avenue, with the delicious scent of the lime-trees and acacia-blossoms filling the warm night air; then through the garden-walks, nearer to the house, where the dear home-fragrance of mignonette fell strangely on their senses. From time to time their leader paused and looked around him; then slowly and cautiously crept on. They were close up under the house now, and there had

not been a stir among the sleeping guards. Lifting his hand, as if bidding his companions wait, Budloo stood on the narrow step leading to a little door just facing them. He touched the wooden panel with his nails, making a sound like the nibbling of a mouse, and the door opened promptly. Budloo stood aside to let his four companions pass in. On the ground to his right a man lay sleeping—an English boot creaked on the gravel—the sleeping figure started and sat upright, his rough head, unturbanned, standing out against the white background of the house.

“Oh, Wazeer, my brother!”

The half-wakened voice scarcely stirred the stillness before its echo died away,—and Budloo’s knife was buried to the hilt in the speaker’s heart! He withdrew the weapon, possessed himself of a tulwar that had lain ready to his victim’s hand, and, following the last of the four sahibs into the house, left the garden to its silence, and the dead

man to tell his own tale at the breaking of the day.

The door by which they had entered was strong and massive, and led into a long narrow passage about two feet wide, with solid walls on either side. Emerging from this passage through a curtained arch, they entered a lofty, luxuriously furnished room. It was dimly lighted, and its rich furniture seemed in disarray. Marlock, their host, was awaiting them. He laid his hand on Budloo's shoulder, with a few words of grateful meaning, and came forward to welcome his countrymen.

"By George!" he said, "you must be half dead. Don't say anything. Eat and drink, and tumble to sleep, and God bless you! The devils are quiet enough, and can't hurt us yet; but they know we have no beef, no mutton, and not a large poultry-yard, and we can't live on air. Budloo, your master is asleep, and so is the Miss Sahib. Go you, also, and eat and sleep."

Nature had surely been severely taxed. Biscuits, cold fowl, and potted meat, and great delicious draughts of beer, made life worth living for some minutes, and gave the exhausted travellers such refreshment, that they were able to cast their weary bodies on the beds prepared for them, and find oblivion for their over-tried and excited minds.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day when Downs awoke, with a consciousness of his bruised and aching body, and a sad foreboding in his mind. He heard voices, and he lay quite still and listened, as in a dream, for the sound awoke in him the memory of very different scenes.

It was Major Leslie who was speaking.

"I suppose it's all right," he said; "but I'm blessed if I feel honoured at having a black man like that in the garrison, a nasty, cringing Mahommedan, but I couldn't leave him to his fate. I know his English companion, too, and wouldn't trust him further than sight; but I must say he does his

share of work, as far as his terror will let him, and the beast is strong. Gad! that chap Budloo is a wonderful fellow. He's got runners out to bring the news; and, by the way, if any one wants to post a letter, he has a wonderful postal arrangement on the top of the house, and he says the Belatee* post leaves to-night. My poor child is writing home to her aunt."

Here Downs rose from his bed; and, walking up to where Major Leslie and Mears were standing, held out his hand.

"Bless my soul, Downs! Another fellow-passenger! That is strange! But, indeed, I am heartily glad to see you, for our sakes, though sorry you have fallen on such unpleasant times. Mary will be pleased; you used to be good friends."

Dauntless and undismayed as he was, his voice dropped to a grave tone when he mentioned her name.

And so—they met again, and the "some

* English.

day" dawned when she showed him the well-worn little volume he had given her, which, with her Bible and her mother's Prayer-book, and a scant supply of raiment, was all she had saved in their rapid flight. The other fellow-passenger Major Leslie had referred to was our old acquaintance Logan.

"They rushed out of hiding by the roadside, he and his nobleman, as he calls him, and joined us just as our own race was nearly over. All alone, no servants, with such frightened faces, they looked as if they'd been robbing a church. Perhaps they had," the major said.

There was an ominous silence that day, and the look-out party on the roof, where shelter had been hastily contrived, reported a suspicious stillness all about the place, where noise and shouting had been rife. Only the dead body of Budloo's victim had been placed well in view, and left there to make its voiceless call for vengeance.

Then it was that Willy wrote his letter to

the squire, and one to Peters, which never reached its destination. In it he said, "I am sorry I forgot all about Mrs. Barton's parcel, but will take the first safe opportunity." He took the letters to Major Leslie, in a little room off the large centre hall. As he entered, Mary was clinging to her father's arm, and her sad, appealing eyes were raised to his face, which looked white and stern and much perplexed. She did not relinquish her hold on Willy's appearance, but, turning her face towards him, said—

"Come, plead for me. I don't want to go in the cellar rooms with the others. I want to live with father, or die with him. Fancy, if he was killed up here, and I living down there!"

A gleam of deadly horror crossed her father's face, but he only said—

"You shall stay," and gently loosed her hands from his arm, adding, "Now go and have a long rest while we are at peace ;

Downs and I are going to post our letters."

Halfway up the spiral staircase that led to the roof he paused—

"God help us! Budloo has had news, which, if it be confirmed, leaves us a poor chance. The troops at Allahabad have mutinied. I am only telling you and Mears and your party. Every preparation has been made here, more cannot be done. We have doubled the look-out on the roof, and must spare ourselves while there is a pause. Go and rest if possible. I will come to you in half an hour."

Obediently and reasonably Willy went back to his room, though he knew no obedience to orders could bring him the rest that was recommended. That packet in his charge was still troubling him, though his thoughts and anxieties were turning tumultuously in quite another direction. The necessity of trying to arrange for its safety in case of a personal disability

to provide it, began to give him some anxiety.

What brief moments of time, what trifling acts lie between us and the utter shaking up of all the small incidents in the kaleidoscope of our lives, changing the colouring of the past, present, and future. He opened the little packet, and found to his amaze that it contained two sealed letters, one of which was addressed to Willy Downs, the other to Mrs. Stephen Holdness. The first was not long.

“Willy, I cannot make myself known to you. My sin has followed me all these years. When you read this, *his* troubles will be over, and then it will not matter. You *know* my baby died. You *know* where I buried him, with only his heart-broken mother’s tears to mark the grave. I stole Miss Letty’s boy that night. Tell her what you saw, and let her have my letter.”

Like a flash the old story came back to remembrance, and, weary and excited as he was, he grew giddy with the recollection. His precarious situation, his neglect of the charge, its momentous bearing—all mingled

confusedly in his remorseful mind. There was an office table in the room where his bed had been placed. He sat down at it. On the letter addressed to him, he wrote—

“It is true ; but then I did not know it.

“W. D.”

He placed both that and the sealed letter addressed to Mrs. Holdness in a large envelope. Before he fastened it down he paused, and taking up a strip of paper, added—

“See that it reaches her. It is the packet Mrs. Barton gave me. I am half mad to think I should have done it months ago.”

He addressed the whole to P. Peters, Great Meaton, near Bymouth, and placed it in his pocket, with the memorandum book he always carried. Then he clasped his throbbing head in his hands, and knew no more.

When Major Leslie returned to seek him, he lay moaning and unconscious in a burning fever. Twenty-four hours of this, with

one or two intermittent intervals, left their marks upon him; he rose from his bed of sickness a mere skeleton. He had left a quiet, still world behind, when the oblivion of disease came upon him; he returned to a consciousness of unceasing din and riot, for now in very deed the unequal contest had commenced. How he rebelled against his feelings, and fought with the enemy that was sucking his strength!—now, when, for the first time in his life, he wanted for urgent use all the health and all the energy and muscle he possessed.

Their little garrison had increased in number, not, alas! on the fighting strength. He, with the sick and wounded, the women and children, had been removed to the thykannas, or underground rooms, and almost the first clear consciousness he had, was the pitying face of the woman he loved bending over him. She thanked God fervently when, with feeble but coherent utterance, he acknowledged her presence,

and then he closed his eyes in slumber for a few hours. After that, weak as he was, he crawled upstairs, to crave a share in the duty of which, after all, the weary watchfulness was the worst part. As long as ammunition, food, and drink lasted, and no guns were brought against them, they could stand out, for the walls were strong and the house stood on high ground.

And now, once more the lines of fate converged, and Downs and Logan met again !

Willy remarked the terrified expression that Major Leslie had described ; but Logan rarely spoke, even to the trembling Calcutta "nobleman" as he called him, who was his companion.

"He looks frightened, poor man !" Mary said, "they both do ; so different from every one else." Her loving glance followed her father as he went up to a tall lady, whom Willy had not seen before. "Do you see that woman,"* she continued. "Oh, it

* See note at end.

makes me feel proud when I look at her. She came in from a place some distance off in charge of a helpless party of women and young children; one or two of the ladies have told me that her energy alone saved their lives. Some of them had seen their husbands and children killed before their eyes, and were so paralyzed with grief and terror, that it took all her energy to make them move. Two little babies were born on the road, and she tore up her own clothes to cover them, and arrived with only a sheet round her, that some pitying native woman had given her. A few police protected them in a half-hearted kind of way, but were insulting and impertinent all the time; still her pluck and daring cowed them, and somehow they all got smuggled in here. How handsome she is! Her father commanded at Gibraltar, where she was married, and she was a great beauty. It makes one feel brave to look at her."

It was now late in the evening of the

2nd of June; the native drum, the desultory firing, the shouts and execrations to which they had grown almost callous, suddenly ceased. The effect was electrifying. To some, came the sudden hope that all the trouble was over, to others it sent a cruel thrill of expectation, a quiet waiting for another phase of horror. After a few moments' pause the voice of conjecture began to find utterance; then suddenly Budloo appeared at the door, and passing swiftly in, sought his master.

Major Leslie's face became grave and deadly pale, but he braced himself to the inevitable, and spoke in a hearty voice of encouragement.

"Now, my good friends all, the struggle is near! Budloo tells me some regular troops have joined the enemy, and they are getting two guns into position. We can only die once—and our women will die with us.—But at present, I only beg the ladies not to be frightened at the roar of artillery ;

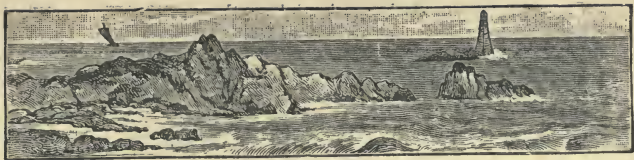
our fine fellows will make a deal of noise before they do any mischief."

"Our women will die with us!"

Mary looked at her father with a steady smile. It recalled to Willy that morning in Egypt, when she had watched the light dawning over the desert sands. It recalled, too, the sad foreboding that had passed through his mind. Was *this* to be the end? Oh, never; surely never! Instinctively, Willy Downs stretched out his hands to clasp hers. What were social distinctions in this supreme moment? His touch drew her nearer to him, of her own voluntary action, and her eyes bore honest witness to her heart's true story.

"Remember," she said, "living or dying, Addio never means good-bye."





CHAPTER XII.

WHOM THE GODS LOVE DIE YOUNG.

BUDLOO'S information was only too true, and very soon proclaimed itself. Not, unfortunately, as Major Leslie had predicted, for, by some strange chance, the very first shot took effect against the raised skylight over the centre room. Broken glass, and splinters of wood and heavy masonry, crashed down into their midst, and when the dust had cleared away, the first victim was declared. It was the poor Nawâb—who had been dying a thousand deaths hourly, since terror-stricken and overwhelmed, robbed and deserted by his retinue, he and his companion had sought

refuge in Major Leslie's care. Though the after success of the enemy's artillery practice fell far short of this commencement, yet twenty-four hours more told a dreadful tale. The women and children were comparatively safe below, and here the wounded were also carried.

Mary Leslie and the tall handsome woman with the lion's heart were unwearying in their labours. Their calm faces and gentle patient words carrying a sad courage wherever they moved. The fighting force, which had numbered sixteen men, was now reduced to seven. Five had been wounded, and four had been killed. Among the latter was the cheerful and untiring Marlock, his wife in the delirium of fever down below as yet ignorant of his fate.

And now one half the house was unroofed, and portions of the side walls showed rents and fissures. The hidden marksmen from within, whose deadly bullets, calmly and truly sent home, had so long held the

enemy in check, began to murmur that their cartridges would not hold out much longer.

Past midnight on the 15th, in the usual lull of that hour, Leslie called his little remnant together. "Let all come upstairs at once," he said; "women, children, sick and wounded, there must be a break in the outer wall soon! Hoard carefully what ammunition remains; in this inner room, with every entrance barricaded, we will fight to the bitter end, for it may be that rescue is at hand. Even Budloo distrusts the sources of his information now, but they say Neale has relieved Allahabad. Let us try and believe it, for hope is a good tonic. All the sharp weapons we possess are placed in here handy, so when the ammunition is expended, we've still one chance left."

It was a weird scene on which the daylight of the 16th broke. In the centre, the sick and helpless all huddled together, the white apathetic faces of those who were unconscious of their surroundings, the

women clasping their little ones in their arms; those who had tasted death's bitterness to the dregs already, waiting with stony indifferent eyes for anything that was to follow. All wasted and drooping, with soiled garments, and tear-stained faces. The men on guard silent and attentive, as the deadly din again commenced, and they felt their fiercest test was approaching.

Mary stood near her father, and by her was Willy Downs. Thud! The whole ruin about them shivered, and a pulse of movement flashed through the little group. Some hid their faces in their hand, some cried aloud, and those who stood alert on guard seemed to stiffen to their task. There was a fall of débris, and the hot morning breeze blew clouds of dust into the forlorn enclosure; but the scene had not changed. Major Leslie looked round the room, then he put his arm about his daughter, and kissed her sweet face.

"Downs," he said, "if anything happens

to me, she is in your care ; don't let her fall living into their power. She is a brave girl, my Mary !”

They could not seal the compact by a hand grasp, for theirs were occupied with deadlier business, but the mournful, steadfast look in Willy's eyes said more than much swearing.

He could not speak ;—the girl placed her hand upon his arm, and drew him nearer, and smiled up in his face—

“ I am not afraid,” she said ; “ not afraid of anything but—parting !”

Again the giant blow against their battered shelter, and the outer walls to their front, parting in the centre with the noise of rolling, reverberating thunder, crumbled down, and formed a low earth-work at their feet, leaving their frail inner defence fully exposed to the enemy.

“ They're expended,” a cautious outlooker cried. “ They're leaving their guns, and running towards us in a disorderly crowd.”

“Keep silence until they’re up,” the major said. “Then greet them with a British cheer from the last bit of lung that’s left in your bodies, and let every weapon in your hands give a good account.”

Before his words were done, Budloo rushed in from his post of danger on the roof.

“By God’s mercy,” he said, “the English soldiers are here !”

Flying for their lives from the red line that pursued them in the rear, burning with rage at losing the joyful carnage which was lying ready before them, the demoniacal rabble came on apace, to grace their flight through the ruined enclosure with a few more deeds of murder and rapine.

They are close upon it now—and through the great breach made by their last shot, and over the slender defence beyond, they see no movement—and they hear no sound.

With yells of joy that they have annihilated the Feringhi, they come on, but, as

they gain the inner barrier, a sound rises up into the air! It echoes in and out of the tottering walls that have witnessed the patient never-failing courage of days past, it wings its way across the dividing space, and fires with new energy the avenger that approaches. It rises up to heaven, to join the choir of dauntless voices that shall not die, that ringing cheer of men who "never know when they are beaten."

Cowed for an instant by this unexpected greeting, the leading invaders pause. Then, urged on by the voices that echo the sound so closely in their rear, they rush, with the fierceness of wild beasts at bay, through the last refuge of their unconquerable foe.

Seven men stood there, grouped around their sick, their weak, and disabled. Then arose a tumult of sound. A smoke and dust and confusion. The disorderly crowd, with deeds of vengeance and despair, fled, through their midst, but closely pursued. Their transit had left its mark. Of the seven men,

three only stood erect. The women and children had escaped unhurt—all save one.

In the front line, over the fallen form of their brave leader, drooped the graceful, white-robed figure of his daughter, and on the bosom of that robe—that had seemed to retain a certain distinctive freshness, even in those fearful scenes—there was a crimson stain!

On seeing this, a cry of dismay escaped from Logan, who was untouched, and he looked round for Willy Downs. A few paces further on he found him, and by him lay the victim of his vengeance. Logan knelt down and raised his head, life was not yet extinct, and kindly care and restoratives were now at hand. A few drops from a friendly flask, roused for a moment his fast-failing energy. One despairing look he cast around, then fixed his eyes on Logan's face. The swift retrospect of the soul about to wing its flight, brought to him the memory of his letters.

“Take charge of this,” he said. “Swear,

by the welfare of those you love best, to try and get it to its destination safely."

And Mat Logan swore.

Downs' head fell back, and they tenderly bore him off.

"Let him die comfortably, poor chap!" the doctor said.

In the fading light of that day in June, just before the little band of rescuers and rescued started on their moonlight march towards Allahabad, the dead were laid to rest side by side, and instead of the hubbub and confusion of the night before, the scented evening air passed over them, and the lime trees and acacias shed their blossoms on the quiet beds where they reposed.

How many such lie sleeping in that far-off land! All honour to their ashes! Unknown—forgotten—it may be; but to them it little matters, for they have found—

"The toppling crags of duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands,
To which our God Himself is Moon
And Sun."



CHAPTER XIII.

CROOKED WAYS.

IF the news of a sudden mutiny in India brought grief to some and horror to all, it brought also serious inconvenience to a good many. Now—though it is humiliating to confess the fact—the delay of funds from the only available source whence they proceed, is an evil which, while it scarcely provides material for an epic poem, takes a pretty high order in the front rank of this life's woes.

How much faith, at this time, had the generous butcher and the compassionate baker to repose in his constituents ; and, alas ! how many creditors received in lieu of pay-

ment of account rendered, the plausible excuse of an unavoidable hitch in their client's financial affairs!

To deal with what was no doubt an exceptional case. There was a millinery shop in Southampton, in which was filed a long-standing list of unpaid-for finery, and very many supply establishments, in that town, filed fellow lists, debited to the same name. The sufferers felt the circumstances according to their kind, more or less, but the accumulated weight sat very lightly on the defaulter.

Logan had left Calcutta, in the end of April, for a long journey into the interior with a native nobleman, who was the latest and most workable mine he had yet discovered.

Lizzie had received a very large sum of money from him before he started, but in the face of possibilities, nay, more, *probabilities*—considering all things—she had no idea of parting with any portion of the sum to pay

for such things as she could get without payment, until further instalments were assured. Towards the end of the year, she, too, had been the recipient of one of those strange little letters.

“Shut in a vile hole, luck bad, no more golden eggs at present, though some are in the nest. If I never come back, tell Frank I have done my best. Everything was going well, if these d—d fellows had only kept quiet. To the boy my first, last thought. Lizzie, death is near me, any chance shot may send me where I don't care to go just yet. I wish I had been stronger, and more masterful for your sake; but past is past, and I dare say I'll turn up again like a bad coin.”

In the February following another letter came, but of the ordinary everyday kind, and dated from no greater distance than the Great Western Hotel. It contained these words—

“Come up here quietly, not a penny in the world. Ask for Moore.”

The reply from this was a prompt visit

from Mrs. Logan in her most fashionable and resplendent attire.

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field.” In Mat Logan’s version, as we know, the woman was the exception to this rule; and certainly his experience had justified his belief.

Dazzling mankind yet, in spite of her forty years, she burst like a gleam of light into the very comfortable private room where her penniless correspondent was smoking a good cigar! A handsome, brilliant, well-dressed, smiling woman. As Mat Logan looked at her, a sort of mesmeric change came over his being—clouds lifted, conscience retired—a very devil of reckless glee took possession of him. Her strong confident nature, and gay fearless mien, seemed to give him a new lease on his broken, crooked, and futile life. Her words were neither polished nor complimentary—

“Mat, you are a fool!” she said. “Really!

Did you mean that you are all on the wrong side again?"

He laughed.

"I thought I was, until I saw you. But I don't doubt you'll set things straight, as you have done before."

"Well, I must know all about it first. *All!* If you are Moore, Logan is dead. Why did he die?"

"Because it was the easiest way of paying his Calcutta debts."

"Good! Then I am his widow, and when I know he's dead, I can honestly sell my property to settle my affairs. I *can* settle them comfortably I can tell you, for I have goodly possessions, so it's not quite hopeless yet. I was beginning to sigh for some variety."

He looked at her triumphant face. He forgot everything that had been, even the long hours of remorse when his life hung on a thread, and he shrank with a cowardly soul from that plunge in the dark which

hundreds around him were bravely taking. Now, a courage, an elation, the counterfeit resemblance of a daring and conquering spirit, animated his depressed and hopeless being in the presence of this clever and beautiful demon, to whom he had bartered his soul. What a woman she was! With a gaiety answering to her own, and a flattery that touched on his loftiest ideal of perfection, he told her she was like "the concentrated essence of a six-dozen chest of best old cognac," and, lost in this intoxication, for a little while he even forgot the boy. The memory woke up, however, with a prick, to the small portion of vulnerable soul that was left him, after this renewed dip in the river Styx, and in a changed voice he asked—

"Does Frank know I am here?"

"No, of course not. You keep forgetting you are dead. But, really, have you brought nothing of all that treasure back with you?"

“Nothing. And yet I risked my life to save it. Oh, Lizzie! such pearls! such rubies! it maddens me to remember. I fell asleep in a hut where I had found shelter, and when I awoke the hut was empty and my box was gone.”

Lizzie looked at him with a glance of disdain flashing from her dark orbs—those eyes that were still the glittering index of the animal soul that lay behind.

“Of course,” she said, “even in such circumstances, I imagine your sleep was rather sounder than nature or mere fatigue ever produces. You don’t deserve that I should ever speak to you again. To think of all your innocent chances, that you might have improved upon without a ripple on your tender conscience, and to behold you here empty handed. Really, Mat, there must be something of the angel about me that I can have patience with you. I don’t wonder it hurts you to remember.”

A reaction was setting in. There were

other things that it hurt him to remember. His laugh was bitter.

"Not quite empty handed either," he said; "thank God. But what I have saved wouldn't interest you. There's nothing to be made out of it, except, perhaps, another target for your arrows."

"Never mind," she answered; "you must tell me what it is, and then we can talk everything over, and do our best. I was really getting rather tired of being rich and respectable. I tried several little excitements, but they didn't amuse me, and the game of being good never agreed with me for long at a time. Oh, by the way, you had better write and tell Mrs. Logan that her poor husband is dead. It will be quite a melodrama—so interesting—she will receive the letter on her return home to-night—poor thing!"

Again a shade passed over Logan's face. "Don't deceive the boy, Lizzie. Tell him all, and send him up here to me."

“Tell him all?—No; I certainly won’t be party to such immoral education. The idea, too, of sending him up here, leaving his poor widowed mother alone with the tutor. Mat, I’m astonished at you!” She leant back in her chair and laughed; a merry softness in her eyes, her white teeth just showing behind the rosy parted lips. With the old air of guileless innocence she held out her hand to him.

“It will only be for a little while, and then, when it is all safe, you can easily come to life again, can’t you? Cheer up, and be friends, Mat; and, believe me, it’s much better for the boy. Now just stay quietly as you are, and tell me about yourself, and how it all happened. I’m dying to know.”

It was a long story, of which he then gave her the outline, and his own nature softened as he told it—as his words described the things that he had seen, and the sufferings he had shared in. The woman whose hand he held listened, leaning back in her chair,

and when the narrator's voice took a ring of honest feeling, her brows were raised with childlike wonder, detecting the spark of that better being that dwelt in him, so alien to anything she had ever nurtured as part of herself. The tears came into his eyes at the memory of that sad parting scene, and the voice and outstretched hand of the brave comrade he should never see again.

"He made me swear to deliver these papers safely, and so, help me Heaven, I will. The first opportunity I had, I sewed the packet into the lining of my coat, and I saved it when I lost all."

She started and sat upright.

"What! You saved the papers and lost the jewels!" She leant back again, with a gesture of utter despair, and her red lips parted as she sighed out, "Well, there's no accounting for tastes. I should have sewn the jewels into my coat."

He let go her hand, and looked at her gravely.

“When death looks you in the face you think differently; and, strange it may be, but when I found I was robbed, I put my hand over that coat, and was comforted by feeling the little parcel there. I wondered at it myself—but it’s quite true—I would not have bought the jewels back with the loss of that letter.”

Again she sighed softly, as in despair of solving such a problem.

“Really, Mat,” she said, “I’ve been pretty constant to you for some years. You might have done that much. Now for this parcel. Show it to me.”

He went into the bedroom adjoining, and returned with an old coat, torn and travel-stained.

“There!” he said. “I see you have the weapons at your side. You can unpick my stitches and take it out, while I go and get some writing paper. Be very careful; the address was faintly written.”

He took up his hat and left the room,

and after a few seconds of industry, Lizzie had extracted the parcel.

Of what avail were seals or fastenings? The unscrupulous eyes of the woman soon mastered its contents.

The very look of the poor coat, in which the sad little letter had rested so long, would have filled any other mind with grave and sorrowful thinking, but the parasite of self had overgrown all such ordinary human tendencies in this one. The tale of suffering it suggested never roused a passing thought, while all her being sprang up on guard, when she perceived that the inner cover was addressed to Mrs. Stephen Holdness.

Poor Willy! His loyal effort, made in that moment of mental and bodily anguish, had only succeeded, as yet, in rousing the slumbering passion of revenge and hatred in the fiendish bosom of Letty's old and implacable foe. Years ago, when she had found her wicked scheme utterly frustrated, she had said in her anger, "I'd like to kill

her, but it's too much trouble. I'll wait my chance; but I'll never lose it when it comes."

It had come now.





CHAPTER XIV.

RESTORED.

WHEN the little band of brave men, and those whom they convoyed, had left the Kkunka Ghur—as poor Marlock’s house was named—*en route* for Allahabad, there was one of the number who lagged behind; the lust of riches giving him a fictitious courage which had hardly shown itself at nobler calls. Logan, thinking quickly to overtake his fellows, had lingered in the rear to recover a certain box, which he had secured and hidden, when his “nobleman” had succumbed to the opening fire of their harassing foe. Into its history, and his manner of possession, we will make no judicial

inquiry. That its contents were valuable was proved by the fact that certain of the retinue, who had before deserted their master, had lingered around with the same intention as that entertained by Logan, of Logan and Son, Calcutta; and though the latter succeeded in securing the treasure, he with difficulty concealed himself from the other aspirants, finally lost the escort, and was returned missing.

After many hairbreadth escapes, and the loss, as he had told Lizzie, of the good things for which he had sacrificed so much, he finally concluded that it would be more convenient to lose himself; and, having been well educated to a shifty life, worked his way home under another name, on excellent wages, and began his career anew under the ægis of the clever woman who had been his curse and bane. He had stood bareheaded in the light of the setting day, and heard the farewell of hope spoken above the graves of those who had lately been his companions

in suffering. His mind was not devoid of genuine regret ; but the half of it was wandering after his hidden gems, and he failed to notice, when the cavalcade started, the assiduous attention paid by the faithful Budloo to the occupant of one hospital doolie, among those that carried the wounded in the centre of the column of march. Had he done so, the course before him might have been less violently precipitate ; as it was, the tumble and toss of the waves of destiny, drew him into the very whirlpool it had been the only good dream of his life to avoid. Succumbing to the cunning argument of the woman who led him captive in spite of himself, he had laid aside his oath ; and the trust he had received from a dying man was shamelessly betrayed.

Budloo's pronunciation of English names not being quite up to the mark, some little time had elapsed after the return to Allahabad, before his relatives discovered that the "Dunn Sahib," who was in the

hospital so ill, was really poor Willy himself.

It so happened that a Mr. Dunn had really formed one of the little party who had risked that dangerous journey with Mears, and in this way the mistake had arisen.

When it was discovered, the poor ladies, though pleased to welcome back one restored from the grave, had been too overwhelmed with sorrow and anxiety to convey the tidings to their friends in England. Willy's right arm being disabled, he could not hold a pen, and his mind was so unhinged, and occupied with sad details, he was unconscious of the fact that the rumour of his death had reached home.

During all his illness, the faithful native servant never left him, and when, after weeks of watching and nursing, intelligence and strength began to return to the invalid, he delivered into Willy's care all that he had saved belonging to his master and the young lady. Some letters, two watches, with chains

and trinkets attached, with these her Prayer-book, and the Tennyson Willy had given her. On the flyleaf, at the end of the latter, were written these words—

“We say ‘good-bye’ and part—the last word spoken,
And past is past.
Perchance the best of life gone by,
And left no token,

“To those we love ‘Adieu,’—the past remaineth,
Its hope undying.
It waits fulfilment where there is, nor death
Nor voice of sighing.”

Long afterwards, the trinkets and letters were restored to the old lady in the ancient manor house, that Mary had loved to talk about, but the books remained with Willy, in tangible evidence of what had been.

“Alas, that ‘had,’ how sad a passage is it!” Leaving his aunt with her desolate daughter, who was lying at the point of death—her happy little family dwindled down to one sickly babe—Willy, in haste to attend to the contents of that neglected letter, which he

remembered giving to Logan as in a dream, moved down to Calcutta on his sad and weary journey home, as soon as his wounds would allow of it. Hope had never held its bright and alluring torch very near him to lighten his way; his love had always been surrounded by an element of sadness; but for all that, his dreams had been of the living! He had known that somewhere in the world the light of her presence was shining, though not for him. The veil of death, and that lonely distant grave, had not fallen between him and the sweet woman who had won his whole true heart, cutting off even the cloud-land dream of ever beholding her face again.

Pale suffering types of humanity were too familiar to attract much notice in the mail steamers of those times, but there was a keen-eyed, energetic little person on board the ship that was taking Willy home, who seemed to make it his business to find out everything about everybody, undeterred by sadness, silence, or gloom. This little man,

with a stolid ignoring of Mr. Downs' evident distaste for conversation, jerked out at intervals a series of short questions on his Indian adventures, to which he received short and desultory replies. At last he evidently hit the point at which he had been slowly aiming, and succeeded also in rousing Willie's attention.

"Man named Logan of your party?"

"Yes, there was."

"Friend of yours?"

"Oh no."

"Killed?"

"No; reported missing—supposed to have been killed."

"You didn't see him dead?"

"No."

"H'm! Fide, sed qui vide."

"I made inquiries," Willy said; "but I was told there was no chance of his having escaped with his life. It specially concerned me, for I had entrusted him with papers."

The little man interrupted him abruptly—

“Valuable?”

“More important than valuable.”

“Indeed, indeed! Well, my name is Stewart, James Stewart—the captain knows all about me. I want this man, you want this man,—if you can help me to find him, I hope in the name of justice you will do so. An innocent man is suffering, and a guilty man is free; once in my hands, I know a shibboleth to make him speak the truth.”

Silently, Willy resolved to give no aid in any such direction, even should the suspicion of the fiery little man be verified. That Logan had escaped was hardly probable; but, if he had, it would be an ungrateful acknowledgment of the services he had doubtless rendered by this time, to lead an enemy on his track. He would go straight to Meaton on arrival, and learn the truth.





CHAPTER XV.

WANTED.

THE squire sat at his writing-table, the pen still in his hand, and the letter just signed on the blotting-book before him. He had paused, before folding it into its envelope, with a question in his mind. Then the door opened and Letty entered.

She looked ruffled out of her ordinary calm, and came up to where her father in his study-chair had turned half round, to greet her with more than usual welcome. It was on his lips to say, "I wanted you, my dear," but before the sound was accomplished, she had spoken, in tones so much less calm than those that were natural to her, that his thread

of reflection was snapped, and he could only feel as she led him.

“Daddy,” she said, “I am overwhelmed and distressed. Tell me, what can I do?” And she held out a letter to him, but before his hand closed on it she drew it back and continued speaking. “I don’t know how to give you this. I don’t know how to account for the feelings it rouses in me. You will be prepared for something unexpected, daddy—something that I think is not true. Read it, dear.”

He rose up, and taking her hand, they walked to the couch in the window, and sat down side by side. With fingers clasped, and head bent down, she quietly waited his opinion, not looking towards him, scarcely breathing, for fear of disturbing his thoughts. The letter was written on black-edged paper, and contained a coloured photograph, a picture of a dark-haired handsome lad, also the certified copy of another letter, and was couched in the following terms—

"DEAR MADAM,

"The original of the enclosed is in my possession. Following confidential instructions, given to me by the writer when on the point of death, I have succeeded in tracing the boy spoken of. I enclose his likeness. In a delicate matter of this nature, the closest investigation is necessary, and I should be sorry to be the means of supporting any imposture. I am making the strictest inquiries, while endeavouring to keep my oath to a dying woman. Should there be any questions which suggest themselves, or any important particulars that require clearing up to make the strange statement acceptable to you, kindly address Messrs. L. Rogers and Co., 200A, Broad Street, London, E.C.

"Yours faithfully,

"L. ROGERS."

The other letter was as follows :—

"MY DEAR LADY,

"I cannot say forgive me. I do not deserve it. I only write to state facts. When you came to me in the Lake Cottage, you gave birth to twin children, a boy and a girl. My boy had just died. The fear of losing him had troubled my husband much. *I stole your son.* You may have heard my husband came in for a good fortune. The boy was christened Harry. He has been brought up with care, as if he had been a prince. My husband has been a dreadful wreck ever since his accident, and could not bear the child to be long out of sight. I could not give him back. When

he is restored to you, I do not think you can ever love him more than I do ; but I have never robbed you of mother-love. It has been my daily cross to look and love and long, and never to take him in my arms or draw him towards me in his heart's affection. When he sees you, he will find the first mother he has known, and then perhaps, some day, you will explain how it was—all for the sake of that other to whom he has been the one brightness of his life. Ask Willy Downs what he saw, and then you will believe me. I am not worthy to recall other things, though I think and remember.

“EMMA.”

The squire read and re-read the letters, then he rose and, looking hard at the picture, turned it face down and laid it on the table. He was greatly excited, and trying to keep as quiet as he could. His voice sank to a whisper as he sat down in his chair and said—

“Should you be glad, my darling?”

“Glad? I don't know, daddy; it makes me feel wicked—all but this poor letter——” The tears fell fast down her face. “And every time it makes my heart ache to think such a piteous story might be real, I turn to shuddering when I look at that picture, and I know there is untruth somewhere.” She

knelt down by his chair, "Oh, daddy," she said, "if only Robert had not died!"

He drew her to him silently, remembering that long-ago time when he had found her patting the brown hunter; then, taking her hands, he looked her in the face with a strange expression of timidity.

"Robert is not dead," he said. "I wanted to tell you."

Robert not dead! and her father to tell her so solemnly. Could it be anything worse than that? Her heart was beating very fast, but she disengaged her hands, and stood before him with the shadows of a hundred fears passing over her sweet face.

"Robert? Our Robert not dead? And you tell me gravely and sad! Why, why is it? Such joyous, happy words! Can it be they have no joy?"

"Wait," he said; "hear all before you speak. It was he who wrote that letter from the pedlar; it was he who was the chief actor in——"

“ Hush ! ”

She placed her hand upon his lips, then walked away and stood silent, thinking. In a feeble way she was beginning to comprehend it all, and though the reflections naturally touched upon the saddest point in her life's story, there was a pulse of joy underlying it that she had never dreamt to feel again.

“ Don't talk, daddy,” she said, stooping down and kissing the beloved, old, care-worn face. “ I want to do all that, and then we will laugh together.”

For a moment it seemed as if tears, not laughter, would choke her utterance, but she soon controlled herself.

“ I can see it all, darling ! Did you think I could bear malice all these years, even so ? But you were wrong, quite wrong. Stephen told me. Stephen told me our own dear Robert had saved him from a dreadful doom, and now you say he has come back from the dead, and I—oh, I have wanted him so

long!" And then, if they did not laugh together, as Letty had said, their tears were from a purer spring of happiness than is the case with a good deal of laughter. The squire showed her the old letters Mrs. Graham had read, and they reverted to the present need, and this new strange subject that had arisen.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"I don't know. I only try to reach him through a lawyer."

"Well, I'll do it this time," she answered; "and *this*"—crushing the other letter in her hand—"it must have a reply, and he will do that for us."

The story of the little garrison that had defended themselves in Marlock's house, had found its way to the papers some months before this, in a letter from "A Survivor." And the news of Willy's death in the moment of victory, with the fate of brave Major Leslie and his daughter, and many

others, including Mr. Logan, of Logan and Sons, Calcutta, who was reported missing, had been read and re-read, repeated and talked over in every cottage that clustered round the well in Widbury village.

At Meaton, too, the quiet dwellers were much interested by the news that brought them nearer to the great general calamity, by the fact of their having known one honoured victim who had added his share to old England's renown.

Harry Barton felt it—as the young feel—with awe of the dreadful thing called death; and Peters, with mingled regret and elation, “less yearning for the friendship dead, than some strong bond that is to be.”

Life and death were words that to him, in his thoughtful moments, bore inverse meaning.

Slowly, but very surely, during these later months, Mrs. Barton's health had been gradually fading away; but she had concentrated all her remaining strength to the

accomplishment of that duty to which she had devoted her life.

To all appearances, she was becoming as deaf and apathetic to other surroundings as was Mr. Barton himself.

But the physician had said there are limits of endurance to the weak human frame, and the time came when Harry appeared pale and trembling to summon his friend.

“I can’t think what it is,” he said. “She asked me quite quietly, ‘When is Mr. Downs coming back?’ and when I said, ‘Oh, mother, poor Mr. Downs is dead,’ she started up and grew quite white. ‘Bring Mr. Peters, quickly,’ she said, and then she fainted away.”

Peters hastened to obey the summons, and the dying woman smiled at his approach. He bent his head to hear her words; her voice was faint and low, and he could only catch a connected sentence here and there.

“Willy Downs knew; he saw it.—I kept

the boy.—Remember.—Swear, and swerve not.”

These words were distinct, but the connecting phrases he could not catch; and then, she left her task for other hands to finish.

Did the sick man miss her living presence? It was hard to tell. The boy tried his utmost to fill his mother's place; but he would say the peaceful moments and quiet smiles came to his father and lighted up his face most frequently when no voice spoke and no hand touched him.

“I am sure mother comes back to comfort him,” Harry said.

Peters was much perplexed. Daily and hourly he kept putting together all the stray words of the poor sad woman who had gone to her rest, piecing them out, as children do a puzzle-map, trying to fit them together, so as to make an intelligible whole; but, think as he would, he was baffled and dismayed.

In the full tide of all this seeking for a thread to lead him through the labyrinth, came the letters from Shirley. He was alone when he received them.

“MY COUSIN,

“I have only just been told. How wicked to keep it from me all these years! You—who saved us from that dreadful sorrow. Stephen told me all. Father is old, and we are in great trouble. Come back to us. We have missed you so. I have suffered much, but I know once again what joy means. Come at once.

“Your fond *little cousin!*

“LETTY.”

Peters sat still and shut his eyes; his face was white, his heart throbbing in great strong beats that seemed to shake his frame—

“Was it joy, or was it pain,
Or was it both together?”

For seventeen years he had worshipped at a secret shrine, and, as by a process of mental incubation, he had magnified the wild mischievous folly of his youth into a crime, so his adoration had intensified, and

the fact, that no glimmer of hope ever lent a possible ray to the future, did not prevent his human imagination from taking its sweet will in those realms, that give to some minds a dreamy oasis of joy in a barren and desert life. And now—what *was* now? He could not grasp it; but one thing was sure, that call must be obeyed.





CHAPTER XVI.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

IN most becoming, but unobtrusive weeds, Mr. Parson's widow had taken rooms at the Three Coaches Inn, where all the best families went when they came to the pleasant little town of Meaton.

She had sweet manners and lovely white handkerchiefs, and a sad plaintive voice. She wanted a front room, because she went out so little, "just now," and she liked to see people moving.

She used to knit—coarse knitting—for her poor people, she said, and always by her on the table was a book of "Comfort for Mourners."

When the landlady came for orders she never wanted much, because her appetite was so uncertain, but she would purr about herself in a confidential way, that led the respectful and somewhat reserved head of the establishment into conversation. In two or three days it had reached this length—

“Very comfortable, thank you ; I think the air is so nice. If I were in better spirits I would almost go for a walk this evening. The people look too civil to stare at a stranger.”

Mrs. James said, “She did not know but what they might do that—only they wouldn’t mean anything.”

“Have you lived here long ?”

“Oh no ; we’re almost strangers. James bought the business on speculation a few years ago, but it suits us nicely.”

“Do you know anything about the people in the neighbourhood ? But of course you do. I suppose they all put up here ?”

“ Well, most does.”

“ I used to be in this neighbourhood as a girl. I remember a General Peters; but I fancy he’s dead long ago.”

“ No, there’s no General Peters; but there is Mr. Peters—a son, very likely. But not a very young man. You’ll see him often go by with young Master Barton. He’s an eccentric gentleman they tell me, and never goes about among people; but he’s the handsomest and nicest spoken I ever saw. There! that’s him passing now. I think he’s coming here, and I’ll be wanted. I won’t forget about the new potatoes, just to tempt you,” and bowing and beaming, Mrs. James left the room.

Mrs. Parsons!—Lizzie Moore’s last *alias*—stood at the window, thankful to be alone. At first she had simply observed his figure walking up the road towards the hotel, and for motives connected with her latest scheme, she had wished to see P. Peters, Esquire. Now she saw him! He

and his companion had stopped to speak to some one they knew, so she did not get a hurried glimpse only. Once, long ago, Mat Logan had wondered if she had a "heart that beat like other hearts." She remembered it now, with a dull wonder that such things could hurt you, when, borne back to her mind on a breeze of the long ago, there gleamed the picture of that morning at day-break, the long shadows of the bushes lying across the common in the dewy light—the very smell of the gorse! Yielding to an involuntary impulse, she murmured, half aloud—

"No one ever walked this earth that was fit to stand beside him." But in that mind where evil had been the cherished guest, no softening thought could rise without its destroying shadow, and noticing the calm strength in his face, the echo of her brother's voice also came back across the years. "I can't sift your devil's games; but there's them that'll bring you to your level."

During her last interview with Ben she had suspected his master was still alive. But why the name that was not his? What did it all mean? Hard and practical once more, she set her wits to work as to how she should get nearer this mystery.

Mrs. James was very loquacious when next she looked in to see if the poor lonely lady wanted anything. Quite unasked she poured out the whole story of the Barton family. How the poor gentleman had met with an accident (one point scored) just before his uncle died, and he came into this property (point two), and the poor young gentleman was so lonely till Mr. Peters came—folks said—for his mother, Mrs. Barton, was so particular about him (point three). “Dear, there’s a deal of sorrow in the world, and I beg your pardon, ma’am, for speaking so. This India has been very hard on some. There was a friend with Mr. Peters a while ago, just after we came, so nice spoken, and such beautiful eyes; and he—poor young

man—will never come back ! Downs, his name was, Mr. Downs” (point four and game).

Now she knew all about it, and could keep watch while Mat worked the ropes from the other side.

Nevertheless, she felt disquieted the next day, when she saw Peters and Harry come up to the Three Coaches, just in time for the omnibus that went to Meaton Junction. The elder man looked very pale and thoughtful, and the boy miserable ; so she quickly concluded that a parting was contemplated, and knew her surmise was correct when the boy returned alone. That evening, after dark, she went out for a walk, closely veiled.

“Poor dear !” said Mrs. James. She went to the house on the beach where Peters lived, and asked if she could see him on urgent business. The landlady was grieved to refuse her, but Mr. Peters was from home, and could not be interviewed.

“Dear me, that is intensely provoking ;

but if you can give me his address, I can write what I wish to say."

The address was—Shirley Hall, Nether Melcombe.

With profuse thanks to the landlady, Lizzie withdrew, and then followed twenty-four hours of hard thinking in her own room.

This produced a warning letter to Logan, a summons to Frank, who was reading with a tutor, to join her without fail at Nether Melcombe; and then, her own departure for that place so timed that these two antagonists passed each other on the road—Peters on his way back to Meaton, Lizzie on hers to Nether Melcombe.

Directly she had recognized her brother's friend as the P. Peters, Esq., to whom the original letter—brought from India by Logan—had been addressed, she had felt the prize she played for escaping her. But that busy and infernal machine, her mind, had quickly evolved other minor plots, not

excluding that of betraying for gold the wretched man whom she had beguiled to his ruin; and the tool she was about to employ on this errand was no other than Frank himself!

When Peters had approached the old home from which he had exiled himself so long, it almost seemed as if every distinguishing characteristic forsook him. He was further removed from intelligent responsible being than ever in his life before but once, and then in a very different way. He trembled, like a child, at the nearness of that presence he had thought never to approach, except in dream.

To his great relief no one met him at the door of the Hall, but the butler, a new dignitary, asked him to walk into the library.

His uncle stood there, as nervous as himself.

“My boy, why have you left us so long?”

There was a strong silent hand-grasp for all reply, and then his nephew looked ner-

vously round. He felt powerless to think or speak until the further ordeal was over.

"Uncle, I would like to see my cousin alone."

When she came in, and took his hand in both her own, and looked into his face, there was a sudden break in the brave voice in which she tried to say—

"Thank you for coming," and the tears rained down from her eyes—tears of relief and gladness—for, as she placed her hands in his, the burden seemed to be lifted from her shoulders, and her very weakness became strength.

In one instant of time, as he realized her beloved presence, the personal feelings that had been throwing his mind off its balance were dominated by the true heart, the unselfish love that was identified in one lightning flash with *her* sorrow and *her* anxiety, while he, individually, as an isolated detail, passed off the plane of the field of action.

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She had given him the letter, that is, she opened it and placed it on the writing-table, pointing to the study chair in front of it, and saying, briefly—

“I was too distracted from the time I left Long Dene to the time when my full senses returned to me in this dear old home, to rely in any way on my own recollections.”

She sat down on the couch, and left him uninterrupted to his task.

He read the letter. There was a familiar ring about the name Emma, but it baffled him when he tried to trace it. He spoke without turning round, his hand still on the paper before him.

“Emma? Who *was* Emma?”

“Aunt Lucy’s nurse—Emma Ray. She married a guard on the coach. He met with an accident, and she suddenly disappeared, and we could never trace her.”

The lines began to converge now into a sort of dim perspective. He bent his head over the letter, and drew strokes on the

blotting paper under his hand. Then, very softly, he said, as the squire had done—

“Should you not be very glad?”

She started from her seat and stood beside the table.

“Robert,” she said, “am I wicked or inspired. I cannot tell—but *this* fills me with loathing—it is *not* true!” And she laid before him the picture that had been enclosed.

To her infinite amaze and pleasure, he took it up, and, after looking at it with a stern expression, flung it from him as an unclean thing.

“Wait one moment,” he said. And seeing that some light had broken upon his mind, and that he was trying to follow it, she was silent, and stood beside him, waiting.

Slowly now the whole story shaped itself before him. Once more, Letty’s happiness had lain in those cruel hands. Mrs. Barton’s dying words, her knowledge of the motto, her letter given to Willy Downs, Willy

dead, and Logan missing at the same place, in strange circumstances—while everything that was dark and unexplained bore the lurid light of a woman's treachery and cunning. But this was not all. And, as the memory of the real Harry rose before his mind—the boy whom he loved better than all on earth, except the star that ever shone above him—an intense joy filled his heart, an unlooked-for answer to his deepest longing! He rose up and stood before her. There was an ecstasy in his face that was almost dazzling.

“My cousin,” he said; “it is now seventeen years since first I stood beside the grave of Stephen Holdness, and, in my misery and remorse, cried out to the invisible powers for some means of retrieving the past. Often since then, unseen by you, I have looked on your beloved face. You have been to me as a saint in a holy shrine to a benighted pilgrim on a desolate track; and all this while, the kindly powers have given

your future happiness into my unworthy hands. I will ask you to trust me. I must inquire and sift a little before I can say anything certain. Have patience a little longer. Your suspense shall be as short as I can make it; and if, before long, I can tell you it is true, and you are glad to know it, then I shall say *Nunc Dimittis*, for I shall have redeemed the time, and my mission will be accomplished."





CHAPTER XVII.

THE MIST CLEARS.

AFTER a night of stern self-questioning, a struggle between the desire of giving to Letty the assurance which would bring her peace, and the other desire of keeping to the letter his solemn vow to poor Emma, Peters had a long talk with his cousin before he started on his return journey. Again she spoke of Emma's letter with tears in her eyes, and said if it was really true—and it sounded so genuine—she would like to go to her, and thank her, and freely forgive her; though at the time, if she had known it then, she felt that there would have been but

small pity for the crime. Emboldened by this, Peters asked—

“If what I think is true, as I believe it is, would your sympathy go so far as to warrant a little delay on my part, if this were necessary, to save the suffering for which she sacrificed her conscience?”

Letty placed her hands in his.

“Oh yes, Robert! Anything you wish, or think right. Even to be patient and wait is a happiness and content, now, feeling that *you* are there, and doing it all for us. Robert, may we not call you by your own name?”

He shook his head.

“No, Letty,” he said; and she knew he meant it.

To the squire he was more communicative, and told him with enthusiasm about Harry, and how a strange fate had made them friends. He told him also of the Bartons. Of her sad life and sudden death; and how he had puzzled over her last words, and

above all—he dwelt upon the promise he had given on the faith of his old family motto, “Swear, and swerve not.” He was sure now that she had recognized him, but dared not speak, until the sudden shock of poor Downs’ death had driven her to the effort, when she no longer had the power to make confession. He explained the cause of his hesitation in the fact of that lingering life; but that even now—while he was speaking—his difficulty might be over.

All he said about the boy went home to the old man’s heart, with a great and full rejoicing in the pleasure that awaited his brave and patient child; but other selfish thoughts came too, and he almost wished it might have been otherwise, as he looked at the lost son who had been restored to him—the noble face and grand figure, worthy of the man that dwelt therein!

After a pause, when their thoughts turned in unison to a subject on which they had not touched, the squire timidly mentioned that

he had recently been to visit the mother's grave.

Robert rose hurriedly.

"Uncle," he said, "never speak of graves. She is not there, but here with me ; always my guide through life to what is called death."

As for Doris, she was so astonished by the strange state of affairs, she could do nothing but wonder. Of course the object of Robert's visit was unknown. Simply that he had come back to life unexpectedly and with another name. They were alone together for a short time in the drawing-room just before the dressing bell had sounded. He was talking to her in a desultory and preoccupied manner, walking about all the time, and taking up lovingly the little trifles he remembered. At last he stopped with a smothered exclamation before a rough grotesque head carved in wood, partly art, partly nature, or rather art built up on nature's suggestion.

"I was wondering if you would remember it!" Doris said.

He looked at her inquiringly, and she came and stood by him.

"I know all your things. That was my fetish when I was a child. I used to think it said things to mother, for when I made her show it to me, she always cried. You see, I've known you all my life, Cousin Robert."

She held out her hand, with frank look and gesture, just like the Letty of old. He held it for a few moments, looking into her face and trying to realize that she was in truth his own dear lad's sister; then he stooped and kissed her forehead, with a feeling that had no words.

"Oh, mammy," Doris said, "I don't wonder that you missed him!"

How he thought of it all on his way back to Meaton! That lavish feast of love spread out for him—so lavishly, so freely, that he knew in the very midst of it he would be

alone for ever. Alone for ever? Could he wish it to be otherwise. Untrue to her whole past life, she would no longer be the woman he adored. "Be true to yourself;" did not that sum up his own rule of living? But he could only walk the path from day to day, so long as the struggle was decreed. So he put self aside, and in the excitement of anticipating the happiness that was so nearly approaching those who were most dear to him, he walked with buoyant step from the Three Coaches to his rooms. The light of a great change seemed to rest on everything, and this effect reached a climax when his old landlady rushed to meet him, putting the smiling waiting-maid aside, and almost falling on his neck and embracing him in her joy, cried out—

"Oh, do 'ee come in, sir; he bean't killed by them blacks at all."

And there, sure enough, pale and thin, but otherwise unchanged, sat Willy Downs! It seemed almost a dream.

How they talked late into the night! The crooked was made straight enough now, and by dint of mutual confidences, never exchanged before, the true relation, borne by different events, to the main history that had originally drawn their lives together, was clear and perfect. For Willy the two old interrupted tales had found their ending; and, within his friend's grasp, there lay that prize for which he had so hopelessly longed in his despair.

At the Cliff House, Harry sat sad and pensive over his book in the quiet room where the dying man still lingered in life, if life it were for the heart to pulsate, and the breath to come and go, without a further token of being. No longer did the boy's voice bring a change over his face. He lay, inert and unhearing, with eyes closed in a sort of painless torpor, and watching over him, with intent purpose to fulfil the charge his mother had left, the lad's spirit was passing through a school of heavy trial.

It seemed to him almost as if he had walked to the end of a road that hung over a yawning chasm. He knew an end was near at hand to the life that was known and familiar, and beyond—was a blank his imagination failed to bridge over. With the sensitiveness of a young and guileless mind, he shrank from trying to frame what he would have that future to be.

Early the next morning after his arrival, Peters sought him. The lad was pale, with dark rings round his eyes, and was with difficulty persuaded to come out into the air for even half an hour. When he did consent, he only went as far as the beach, within sight of the windows, so that he could be summoned if required.

It seemed to Peters rather an inopportune moment to fill the boy's mind with light and hope and happiness, and remembering also his own promise, he hesitated to speak the words he was burning to say. One bit of pleasure, however, he was fain to impart.

"Just fancy who I found in my room when I came back last night—some one we never thought to see again. Mr. William Downs! alive, and, not quite well, but on the road to it. His story will interest you."

An exclamation of wonder and pleasure burst from Harry; then his lip quivered, and the tears brimmed over.

"How glad poor mother would have been." His tired frame gave way, and he sobbed like a child.

"Come, come," his friend said; "this will never do, Hal! I can't allow you to make yourself ill. There is a world of life and love and happiness before you. You must look forward, and not dwell on the past."

"I know I have you—but nothing else. No home—no people; no——"

"Hush, hush! that is not so. Suppose I tell you it is not so; that everything is different from what you think, and have always thought; almost, that *you* are not *you*, but some one else."

Harry smiled through his sadness.

"I am afraid I wouldn't believe you, Flint," he said. "What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Do you remember, Hal, when you and I were first friends, how we used to enjoy ourselves on this beach? After old Purdie taught you to net, you used to make me tell you old-world tales of the Greek heroes, whose names were just dawning in your mind?"

The boy nodded his head.

"Well, I am going to tell you a story now. *Not* an old-world story. Listen and think. Once there was a poor woman who had one sickly infant, and its father loved it and she loved it; but the child died. And there came to her house a rich and beautiful lady in great trouble, and God sent her two fine healthy children. And the poor woman thought of her husband's sorrow, and how he would come back to his home, but never hear the merry voice of a child, or watch the growing of his son into manhood. She was

tempted, sorely tempted, and she stole one little child and kept it. The sin lay heavy on her heart. But though she and her husband gained great riches, he had met with a terrible bodily hurt that ruined his life; and his one joy on earth was that child—that was not his! She loved him so, that for his sake she carried her sin sealed up in her own solitary knowledge, where it eat into her heart. She loved the boy too, but dared not kiss or caress him, because, though she had robbed the mother of her child, she did not want to add another sin, of stealing from the child the love that is only a mother's right. Then she died, and left her confession. And the gentle lady who had been so wronged pitied and forgave. But there was great joy in her heart to think she had a son; for his father had died many years before, and there was wealth and a large estate, and no heir to inherit it." He paused, then added in a low voice, "That poor sinning, but self-repress-

ing, loving soul, was she whom you have always thought to be your mother."

The boy sat listening with his face hidden in his hands. Presently he looked up.

"It is a beautiful dream," he said ; " but I must wake up from it now, and dream it again when I can, without being false to everything that has always been true until now. I am going back to father ;" and resolutely he got up and returned to his sad watch.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A CRISIS.

IT had been with a painful interest that Willy Downs had seen once again his old friend Guard Phillips, and recalled the strength and vigour of the man he had so often admired, who now lay unconscious and helpless before him.

Sitting with Harry in the quiet room, with a perception not keener than in his early days, but touched with deeper feeling, because he himself had lived and loved, Willy spoke to the boy of Emma's heavy trial and suffering, and dwelt tenderly on the motives for her sin in the first place, and the same motive, intensified, that had led her under

constraining circumstances to continue the deception ; condemning his own forgetfulness in regard to the letter which had so fatally miscarried.

Harry listened with eager gratitude. He could not but feel the comfort of any words that exonerated the dead woman, whose sad life he had known so well ; and his heart was filled with pity, and a fervent purpose to be true to the past, in the strange position in which he found himself. Physically also, Willy's presence was a great rest to the boy. He had no compunction in leaving the sick man in his care, while he took the rest he so sorely needed. Daily the glad hope Peters had kindled grew in his heart, as it was natural that it should.

It was on the third day after Peters' return from Shirley that there came another letter from Letty. He had been trying hard to curb his impatience, or reconcile immediate action with his conscience ; but he was held back partly from respect for Harry's honest

scruples, partly from his own hesitation to take the boy away while any of that fleeting life remained which he had pledged himself to guard.

This letter, however, seemed to demand urgent attention.

“DEAR ROBERT,

“I am overwhelmed with fear. If, as father tells me, it is my old enemy who is at work, what may be happening? That boy is here at Melcombe. I saw him. I asked who he was, and the coachman told me he was staying with a lady in the town. Dear Robert, will it soon be ended?”

Peters carried this letter to the Cliff House, where Willy Downs had by mutual consent taken up his abode, and in his presence he spoke to Harry.

“I would not ask you to come away,” he said, “if I did not know that it would make no difference. The doctor told me it was quite impossible that any ray of recognition would return now. Downs is here, and you can come back if wanted; but, to save your

mother pain and anxiety, your presence in your proper place is necessary. Come with me, Hal ; I know if *she* were here she would so counsel you."

He placed the little letter in Harry's hands and turned away, knowing something of the magic influence the look of it, and the feel of it, would have on the boy. So, advised by his best friend, led by his natural longing, he ceased to strive.

With many lingering injunctions, and a very genuine sorrow struggling with anticipations, that at the time it seemed almost sinful to indulge in, he and Peters started for Nether Melcombe and the old Hall.

Now little things are the hinges on which great things revolve, and a little thing had gone wrong with a steam-engine on a branch line. This was sufficient to cause several hours' delay to two impatient travellers, with the result that it was very late when they reached Melcombe. Peters, having left himself no time to send notice of his coming,

thought it would be best to stay at the inn that night, and appear at Shirley next morning to put the finishing stroke to his glad triumph. It was the beginning of April now, and, in one of its mild moods, our changeable climate was giving a few days of summer warmth out of its proper season. The air was balmy, and the full moon shining like day. The inn faced into the square, as in the old days when the coaches made the place gay and lively with their coming and going; and at the back of it lay a picturesque old-fashioned garden.

Their arrival was not unnoticed by the vigilant eyes of that woman, who, feeling that her vengeance was thwarted, and her interests interfered with, was possessed with seven devils.

Weary with long watching and depressing surroundings, agitated beyond expression by the mental exercises to which he had subjected himself, in his morbid fear of deserting his post, Harry was completely worn out. The

remedy that lies so handy to youth and a good constitution commended itself to his careful guardian, and, after a good meal, he led his charge to his bedroom, and saw him snugly settled for the night. Then, in the company of his beloved pipe, he went to take a walk in the inn garden.

Melcombe lay in a hollow, and from this garden there were no distant views of spreading landscape—only the outlines of tree-tops on the surrounding higher ground ; but these outlines were well-known and familiar, and far away under the stars and the moonbeams, Peters knew where—in a dip of the oak-crowned hill—was the house that held a beloved woman whose life had been wrecked by his selfishness. This was the first time he had walked in the inn garden since that pilgrimage to Stephen's grave so many years ago, and his soul within him sang for joy, to know what a full and perfect happiness he was bringing, as his offering in atonement for the past. How that past had

weighed him down with bitterness and despair when last he walked those trim old-fashioned paths! Holding commune with himself, his eyes fixed upon the distant point, the light cloud of consolation rising in slow spirals into the air, he stood with the full light upon his noble face and broad powerful form. He thought he was alone, but, tempted by the mild air, and having questions to consider that loved darkness better than light, another had preceded him. Sheltered by the open trellis-work of a rustic summer-house, another woman watched him. In the darkness of shadow, made more intense by the vivid brightness of the moon, her hidden eyes were filled with a softening memory, and for a brief moment, the immortal within her strove hard to light a flickering flame of repentance, among the ashes of the soul she had destroyed.

With a sudden impulse she rose, and stepping out of the shadow into the broad

light, stood upon the garden path facing him. Startled and confused by the unexpected apparition, so unlike the image he was worshipping in secret, he hesitated for a moment, and met the look that was raised to his face without any definite expression—but surprise.

Emboldened by the pause, she stepped near and laid her hand upon his sleeve.

“Do you never forgive?” she said.

As if a serpent had stung him, he shrank away, and brushed his sleeve with the other hand, his eyes full of withering scorn.

“Reptile!” he said; and, leaving her where she stood, walked away towards the house.

Seven devils! Their name was legion now. She followed his retreating form with a cruel murderous glance, then, returning to the summer-house in the shade, violently shook something that lay upon a bench there.

“Get up, you little beast,” she said. “You are as sodden as your father. I want my shawl.”

Folding it about her, she walked rapidly up and down on the long path ; a very pandemonium surging in her mind, and a whirlwind, raised by every unbridled evil passion of her life, hurling her onwards on her dark unscrupulous career.





CHAPTER XIX.

TRUE TO HIMSELF.

THE letter Lizzie had written to Logan produced in him a curious impression, totally different from that which it was intended to create.

“Be very careful, there is an enemy in the field. I am going to watch.”

It was put into his hand in the early morning, after a restless night of dreams. Every time his eyes had closed, the scenes of the past year had been enacted over and over again, with strange and grotesque variations. Again the deadly terror took possession of him, and he shrank from the expectant fear of

what might come at any moment, as the roar of artillery reverberated through the ruined walls of the dismantled house—and everywhere—everywhere the face of Downs, like an avenging spirit, seemed to meet him and require something at his hands. He could not flee, he could not hide, but it followed and found him out, and he woke up panting and exhausted with his imaginary struggle.

A very brief acknowledgment had come to the letter he had addressed to Shirley Hall, with the assurance that his address was kept in case "further reference were necessary." Each day, as it brought him no need for progressive action, was an intense relief, such as would have excited the scornful contempt of the more energetic evil-doer who had placed him on this road, "for the boy's sake."

Weakly obedient to her ruling, he remained at his post, waiting for a letter. Strange to say, the actual words of his oath to the dead man had quite faded from his

memory, until they came back to him in the agitated dreams of that night.

“By the welfare of those you love best.”

The cold dew stood on his forehead, as his waking memory recognized the formula, and his conscience reproduced the real scene.

Therefore, when he read Lizzie's words, his soul seemed to spring up as freed from a snare, and the foe that was “in the field” was hailed as a harbinger of deliverance from the heaviest burden he had ever laid upon his not too-sensitive conscience. At once he began to write to Lizzie. “If this is true, we had much better retire. Our footing is too slight to bear any shaking.” And then he tore up the letter, and decided to join her, imagining her to be still on the defensive at Meaton.

Logan's life had been varied, and nearly every phase of broken laws had attended his weak and feeble career. The reason why this last divergence from the path of uprightness lay heavier on his soul than others

had done, was partly because of a superstitious shrinking from the idea of breaking his oath to a dead man, which was quite in accordance with his weak and cowardly nature.

In laying down this burden, with its element of fear, the other unrepented and unremembered acts of doubtful morality were swept out of sight by a sudden relief and freedom from the haunting horrors of the powers of darkness. And, touching on the borders of his better self, so hidden and overwhelmed by unworthy prompting, was the memory of the gentle gracious woman, whose purity and goodness had reached and softened his heart during the brief period of her influence. That memory was overshadowed and embittered while he held on the treacherous course marked out for him ; but now he began to imagine that, after much schooling and failure, a certain strength of character was about to declare itself ; and that, confident in the validity of his reasons,

he would silence Lizzie's scruples, and succeed, it might be, in creating a new future for them all.

It was his last dream of hope.

With cold unfeeling light the great moon was shining down upon the world of myriad little man !

Willy Downs saw it from the windows of the Cliff House, as the wavelets of the sea gently rose to catch its points of light, and then pass on into shadow. The spirit of the man who lay, just breathing, in the dimly lighted room, was slowly but surely taking its flight, and Willy, burdened with the chain of sweet and bitter memories, was solacing his sad heart with the renewal of past scenes, when the moonlight on the waves had touched him with far different feelings.

Lizzie saw it in the inn garden, and hated it—hated its light, that had revealed to her the only baffled ambition of her life, and witnessed the contemptuous scorn that had hurled her into the nethermost hell !

Mat Logan saw it shining on the peaceful country landscape, as he drove on the coach to Meaton from the junction, and *it* saw his changed and frightened face when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Here you are, Rogers—Moore—anything you like. Matthew Logan is good enough for me. My name is only James Stewart!"

* * * * *

Peters also saw it shining through the window on the little white bed, and lighting up the smiling, peaceful face of the sleeping lad, whom he had loved so dearly all these years.

Angry and indignant, with a protecting instinct he could not explain, he had walked direct from that poisoned garden-ground up the stairs of the inn to where Harry was sleeping. The curious old-fashioned oak staircase led for about a dozen wide steps straight from the middle of the hall to a landing where a large arched window looked out upon the market-place, and narrower

steps, and fewer in number, branched off to galleries right and left, where the bedrooms were situated. At the end of the corridor on the right, behind a tall house that flanked the long old-fashioned inn, was an ordinary window, looking out on a crowded timber-yard, while the corridor to the left ended in a narrow staircase which led upstairs, and also down, and into the stable-yard and back premises.

The two rooms on the immediate right had been allotted to Peters and Harry ; so the former, in his excited state of mind, entering the door of the first room, which had been left partially open, stood by the bed, and looked at the boy. Strange to say, he noticed now what he had never remarked before, in all those years of companionship, and that was the strong likeness Harry bore to the Stephen Holdness he had known in his wild youth. He was human ; with a passing pain he realized that—distinct from Harry himself, as himself only—that link

would pre-eminently bind him to his mother's heart. But it was a passing pain, and every selfish thought of loss or longing passed away in a determination that his precious charge should not remain one hour longer than necessary under the same roof that covered his mother's enemy. He roused the tired boy from his slumber.

"Quickly and silently, Hal," he said, "dress and come with me. I cannot rest until you are safe in your own home. We'll walk it in twenty minutes; it's not ten o'clock yet." And in less than a quarter of an hour they had started.

"Lovely night for a ramble, Mr. Hanam. I suppose you don't bolt and bar very extensively?" Peters said to the landlord, who was smoking his pipe in the front of the door.

"No, sir; no. Turn the key when you come in. We're pretty honest about here, and don't have much fear of our neighbours."

The two walked swiftly and silently at first up the road that Peters knew so well,

past the Lake Cottage, and the spot where, after so many years, he had again been brought in contact with Willy Downs.

Emma Phillips' sad story was known to him now, and all the details of that bygone day recurred to his mind, but overweighted and obscured by the anxieties of the present hour.

Never had these two taken so stern and silent a ramble together ; and now, the green lanes passed, they reached the park gates and were admitted.

A few yards further, they turned the bend where the picturesque old Hall came into view. Bathed in the moonlight, surrounded by its stately woods, with lights twinkling here and there inside its hospitable walls, stood the house that was to be home henceforth to Harry Holdness.

Suddenly Peters stopped, laid his hand on Harry's shoulder, and with his low laugh, and in his natural manner, said—

“ Look round, young man ! Do you know

this is your home, and your inheritance? Now I want to tell you something. Once I feared it was to be mine, and I did not want it. For complicated reasons, too long and sad to talk about now, I wished to sever myself from all ties, all relations; but a kind Providence placed *you* in my hands, and this home, and all the best that moves in this created world, has fallen to the share of—— Well, Hal, how shall I say it?—you know the love I bear you, boy. Come! Mother will tell you all the rest.”

And, removing his hand from Harry's shoulder, he walked on.

For a minute or two Harry was silent, then quietly pacing beside his companion, whose steps began to linger as the end approached, he spoke—

“It *is* beautiful, beautiful and good, all that is coming to me; but I must have you, too. Nothing that ever comes, however dear and precious, can take *your* place, or be what *you* have been.”

They spoke no more until they stood by the steps that led to the great oak door of the hall.

Peters rang the bell.

"Walk up and down here," he said. "I'll call you."

Letty had anxiously awaited the reply to her letter, and very vain was her attempt to conceal her restlessness. The fact that both her mother and her grandfather were anxious and perplexed could not escape the watchful eye of Doris. For some little while she kept silence and was patient, as a dutiful child should be, but finding their gloom, and her own curiosity, increasing in due proportion, her open and impulsive nature leapt the boundary, and boldly lifted the weak disguise.

"Mammy," she said that evening after dinner, seating herself on the stool at her mother's feet, "'once upon a time' we never had any secrets. What have I done that you and granddad should be sad, and

leave me out in the cold? Do you think I can be happy when I see you both making such dreadful pretence that there is nothing the matter? See, I've made him very snug with the lamp and the paper, and we had a long walk this afternoon, so I know he'll be dreaming over the House of Commons in a few minutes more, and I'm just going to sit here and hold you tight until you tell me all about it. How beautiful the moonlight is! It is as bright as day. I'm so glad we left the windows open. Now, mammy, take your time; but give me half the trouble to carry for you."

And then Letty told her—told her all; the purport of the cousin's visit, the quest on which he had departed, and the words that he had spoken with reference to what might be. And Doris, lifting a smiling face, looked at her mother with radiant eyes, and said softly, as the squire had done, and as Peters had done—

"Wouldn't you be very glad, mammy!"

The tears brimmed over Letty's steadfast eyes, but the girl only clasped her hand more tightly, and leant her cheek caressingly against it.

"Oh, I *feel* it's true," she said.

So, sitting in silence for awhile, thinking thoughts that differed, as youth and middle age must differ, but in spite of that, merged into the same sunny possibilities, Letty certainly felt as if she had replaced half her burden of anxiety by the hopeful gladness that, without more words, the girl had seemed to impart to her.

The squire was comfortably nodding over his parliamentary news, and everything was still.

Then the hall-door bell rang. The mother and daughter exchanged no words, but they both rose and stood expectant.

The butler came in. He brought to Letty a card, on which was written, "I want to speak to you."

She left the room, and Doris, with a

beating heart, walked to the open window and stood there. For how long she stood she did not know. It seemed to her that this new thing her mother had told her was no new thing at all. Surely she had known it all along! On some evening like this it had happened before, somewhere—somehow—and then the thread of her memory snapped, and she could not remember how it had ended.

There was the sound of a footstep on the gravel walk, and she stepped outside the long window opening to the ground and looked round. Some one was pacing up and down, bare-headed, his cap held in his hands, the paleness and agitation of his young face clearly seen in the brilliant light. Without a moment's hesitation, she went up to him and held out both her hands.

“Did Cousin Robert bring you? Are you my brother? I am Doris.”



In the meanwhile, Peters had been shown into the library ; and very quickly he heard Letty's footsteps cross the hall. How beautiful the dear face looked as she entered the room in her long dark robe, with soft white lace about her throat and delicate wrists ! The question was in her eyes, and he answered it.

"Yes, it is true. He is here. I have brought him to you safely to-night. Strange to say, Willy Downs has returned, and proofs are conclusive. Letty, when you see your boy, you will ask no questions. As you look upon his face, you will almost think I have given you back the past of which my selfishness deprived you. Pity me—forgive me !"

"Forgive ? There has never been anything to forgive. Nothing but a long debt of gratitude that I never can repay."

The tears were in her eyes as she came near to him and looked into his face, almost inviting the kiss of peace, as in her girlish

days. So trusting, so grateful her tender voice, her gentle manner. For one wild moment he felt tempted to take her in his arms, and sigh into her ears his life's devotion ; but, with a truer light flashing across his spirit, his sanity of mind returned, and he recognized with a passion of hopeless human love how, for ever and for ever, while suns rose and nights darkened over his earthly life, that life must be lonely and uncompleted.

With a sudden pause, and a change she could not understand, he hastily pressed his lips upon her hand ; and saying, " I will come again to-morrow," left the house without any further farewell.

He was rather startled not to find Harry where he had left him ; but walking forward a few paces he saw the two young figures standing by the open window on the terrace, and he knew that soon a third would join them. He turned towards the drive and walked away, his heart beat wildly with

the excitement of it all ; and from some unexpected corner of his mind these words were singing, surging in his ears—

“Love took up the Harp of Life, and smote on all the
chords with might,
Smote the chord of Self, that trembling, pass’d in music
out of sight.”

He pressed his hand hard to his left side, and said to himself with a feeble echo of his old humour—

“My ‘self’ is marching out, to the music of the big drum.”

Then suddenly he paused, and turning, looked long and steadily at that dear home, where happiness had entered in. For a long time he stood there, still as a statue. His white face raised to heaven, his eyes closed, his clenched hands hanging at his sides, and in his spirit, the suffering and the strife,—the love that demands, the love that abnegates !

By the time he had reached the inn at

Melcombe, he had "schooled himself into a kind of quiet." He remembered to turn the key in the lock as Hanam had requested, and proceeded upstairs by the light of the hanging lamp which was still burning. As he passed Harry's room—the door ajar—he gave a sigh and looked in. The moon no longer shone upon the bed, but by the light from the passage he could see that something dark was lying there. He struck a match and lit a candle.

There—limp and dishevelled, with his collar unbuttoned, his tie askew, his face flushed, and his breathing heavy—lay the very lad who had walked with him from the docks at Southampton the day that Willy Downs had left for India !

Peters' wild tumult had reached a softened stage. In his inmost soul he pitied the boy who lay there in that unmistakable repose. Why should he disturb him ? With his old mocking smile he looked round the room, tried the lid of the portmanteau to be sure

it was locked, and taking Harry's overcoat from the peg behind the door, hung it on his arm and took it away with him. Then, wearied and exhausted, he went to bed and slept a sound and dreamless sleep.





CHAPTER XX.

SAFE.

ABOUT an hour before Peters had returned from his evening ramble, but close upon midnight, when the weird shadows grew long, as the moon's level rays bent slowly to the west, Lizzie had re-entered the inn, preceding the young man, who slouched in behind her with unsteady steps. She sought her own room in the left gallery, without further heed to his proceedings, while he stumbled up the stairs as best he could, and careless where he went, flung himself on the first vacant bed that offered.

Soon deep stillness reigned over the market-place and the grey church, the little

town and the wide undulating country ; and then, in the darkness that comes before dawn, and out of the stillness of the night, silently and unawares, a hungry implacable demon reared its terrible form amid the unconscious sleepers in Nether Melcombe town.

At first a white, curling, changing pillar of smoke rose up against the sky, where faint stars were shining above the quiet old inn ; and then the phantom white gave place to the wrathful glow, as forked tongues of flame leapt out into the darkness. In a few moments of time, shouts and cries filled the air, and confusion spread from house to house, until nearly every member of the frightened little community was adding to the bustle and turmoil round the burning inn.

Alas ! help was eight or ten miles away, and nothing but weak means at hand to stay the devouring enemy. Awakening from a heavy sleep to a sense of smoke and suffocation, Peters had half dressed himself, and, finding exit barred by the raging flames

that were making sad havoc of the oak staircase and the panelled hall, flung wide the window of the room facing the square, and his tall figure stood out against the light.

As the crowd perceived him, a new tumult arose. A ladder was speedily brought to his relief, and voices shouted to him, "Come down, sir ; come down ! There's no time to lose. We thought they were all out before now."

Something made him hesitate, and in a calm clear voice he said—

"Are you sure there's no one left ?"

"Sure, sir ; quite sure !"

Then he stepped on to the ladder and came down.

"Have you looked to the timber in that backyard, it would spread the flames ? Nothing can save this part of the building now."

And, as he spoke, the landlady came up excitedly, wringing her hands. She spoke

to a tall woman, who stood, pale and calm, in the market-place.

“There’s *no one* there ; they’ve looked in every room on the left corridor—they can’t get to the other side. Oh, the poor young gentlemen, where are they ? Who spoke the wicked lie that they were safe, while we had time to get them ? ”

In a harsh and horrible voice the other replied—

“He *must* have got out ; there was nothing to stop him. Frank ! Frank ! where are you ? ”

There was no time to hesitate. The window from which he had descended was intact, the ladder still stood there, though the bright flames raged behind.

Without heed to the purport of the words that were shouted to deter or encourage his bold attempt, Peters entered the burning fiery furnace, while on the crowd outside there fell the painful silence of suspense.

Horried by the sound of the woman’s

voice calling for her son, the truth had appeared to him like a flash of lightning. Her wicked purpose he did not doubt; but he knew that by a strange fatality her victim had escaped, and her own boy, safe as she had imagined in the left corridor with its easy egress, had taken his place. Jubilant that he had followed so promptly the intuition which led him to secure Harry's safety, with his heart singing a "Te Deum," that left no place for fear of anything his evil genius could do to him now, he strode past the group and back to the ladder, and when after a breathless suspense he appeared again, with a helpless burden in his arms, a deafening cheer broke the silence, and eager men pressed near to give what help was possible. But now the flames rushed out from the windows of the room beneath, and wrapped the ladder in a sheet of fire—just as the outstretched arms of the bystanders had received the lad so nobly rescued from his threatened doom. The

ladder, burning like tinder, fell without a sound, and the grand figure, erect and undaunted, stood in its fiery framework without any means of escape.

A groan of horror sounded as if from one voice of the assembled watchers. But another ladder was quickly brought and placed against the house. One more journey through a fiery trial, and he is safe! Clear as a bell his voice rings out, "All right!" and as the words still echo in the ears of the eager breathless people, the whole front of the old inn falls back into the flames burying in its destruction the noble image of a man. With glad rejoicing light, the brilliant flames seemed to concentrate above the spot, and leap upwards towards the sky, then fall exhausted back to earth, and only the smoke of the sacrifice ascends to heaven. But there was light in the east, and glad dawn had arisen.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREEN CURTAIN.

AND so the curtain is about to fall over the little group of people in this life-drama, whose threads of fate were so closely interwoven. The curtain falls, but the life-drama does not end. Poised between two mysteries hangs the human life, the essence of that being that animates the wonderful mechanism. Whence comes it? and what is the untravelled country to which it hastens? Poets, sages, philosophers; the audacity that dares in the name of revelation to draw the portals a mighty Hand has closed; the fool who says in his heart "There is no God;" the trembling soul that bows to the yoke of

custom and tradition,—all these have loosened their perished and untaught tongues, to declare the secrets of Great Death, and that which lies beyond. None among them all has raised a corner of this solid veil, built into the foundation of the earth since the advent of the human race. But one thing is sure, a man's deeds live after him. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes ; but for good or for evil the “has been” is, and that which is the mystery in the visible but fading tenement, leaves its track of glory or of shame, to guide, or to betray, those who follow after.

To the squire, so near the ferry himself, his nephew's loss was but one more link on the other bank of the dark stream, but that loss threw a cruel lingering shadow over many a loving heart. Still, youth and healing time spreads balm over the sharpest pain, and those who have learnt to look beyond can temper sorrow with hope.

Many eager eyes watched for Peters's coming in the old haunts where he had loved

to wander with open hand and kindly heart. His quick, short laugh, and the abrupt gestures with which he disguised any softness of feeling, his strong broad figure, and brave far-seeing eyes, lived long in many a memory where he never thought to dwell. He had crossed Ben's pathway now, and that margin past which our sight fails to perceive.

With snowy hair and the calm expectancy of age, Letty, surrounded by young and smiling faces, still awaits the summons that must shortly come. Close to the harbour-bar, waiting for the day, lying passive in a sea of faith and love, she doubts not but she shall find them there!

And Willy Downs the dreamer? He is not alone in the old home where he was born. Hardly recovered from his struggle for life in the terrible day of trial, he was ill-prepared to bear the sudden blow that took from his sight that friend to whom he had given such steadfast devotion, and for whom, in his dreamy and creative mind, he

had begun to shape a future of joyous reward and unquestioned honours.

During all this sad time the ladies at Meaton Rectory had been very kind, and one among them more sympathetic than the rest. For many years she listened to the oft-repeated tale of adventure, and by the pause, and the far-away look in Willy's speaking eyes, she could tell, more than his words might warrant, of the love that lay sleeping under the burning sun of that far country. She was short, and rather plump in figure, with a gentle voice and quiet homely ways, and when the shadows were lengthening on their paths, and the keenest smart of past trouble had softened down, Annie Hignett became Mrs. Downs. She worships him still, with the unquestioning faith of a simple honest heart. Perhaps the volume of Tennyson, and the withered flower in the old pocket-book, lie just beyond the region where she reigns ; but it is quite possible that she would accept the fact of their existence without one

jealous pang ; there are a few women in the world like that.

Logan's sins had followed him, and he remained in the hands of justice until the penalty was paid. He and his boy are still numbered among living men. Through the dark windings of an ever shifty career there is a link between them which serves to keep alight a lingering spark of human soul.

No punishment has overtaken the woman who drew Logan to his doom. She has felt no poverty, no pain, no compunction. She clings with tenacity to life, and only dreads the coming of the King of Terrors.

Whether the light she quenched within her will be required at her hands—is the unanswered question.

So the curtain falls ; but there is no end,—for beyond the screen the play goes on.

NOTE TO PAGE 165.

One figure on this mimic stage the writer would fain call to the front before the audience departs. Pictured from real life and true to nature, is the tall handsome woman with the lion's heart that, aided only by her dauntless courage, saved the lives of so many who would have perished by the roadside in their weakness. No sketch from fancy this; the story is true as it is written. Surely this beautiful and courageous woman has merited an undying name among England's real heroines. If she still lives, or if the earth has covered her dauntless breast, the writer cannot tell. No cross of honour ever hung upon her heart, her name has never struck the public ear, but the annals of that day of noble deeds, is incomplete without her story! The fame of her unselfish acts seems never to have spread beyond the little area where they took place, lost in the multitude of strange and grand events; but for all that, she is a portrait from the life of one of England's daughters. —J. C. C.

THE END.

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